THE WRONG NUMBER

PETER LUCK

THE WRONG NUMBER

THE WRONG NUMBER

BY

PETER LUCK

BOSTON
SMALL, MAYNARD & COMPANY
PUBLISHERS

Printed in Great Britain at the Athenæum Printing Works, Redhill.

TO

ARTHUR COMPTON RICKETT

2136796

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I	THE WRONG NUMBER	9
II	A WOMAN'S REASON	45
III	THE HUNDREDTH CHANCE	81
IV	THE MODERN BILL SIKES	114
V	THE LADY OF THE TELEPHONE ..	145
VI	A TEST OF LOVE	174
VII	METHOD IN HIS MADNESS	200
VIII	TWO WOMEN	226
IX	BOLT VERSUS BAR	252
X	MOLLY MAKES GOOD	281

THE WRONG NUMBER

CHAPTER I

THE WRONG NUMBER

JACK DENHAM flung his half-smoked cigarette into the empty grate and his book on to the floor, and got up from his chair. He crossed to the window and looked out. He considered that Lennox Street, in which his rooms were situated, looked particularly tame that evening ; there was an atmosphere of dull stagnation about everything. And he wanted movement, excitement, something doing. The book he had been reading was brim full of amazing incidents, but it left him cold and unimpressed.

"Tosh!" he thought. "Nothing exciting like that ever happens in real life. I wish it did. I'd give half this blinking fortune I've come into in exchange for a real adventure."

And so he would. He had groused away to his friends, that being far too young he had just missed the war, which was his infernal luck, and when that was over what was there for a man to do? What should he do now?

Ring up one of the girls and take her to a play he supposed, and he had seen all the plays that were then running in London. No, too dull. Well, anyway he would have to dine somewhere, and dress, and bore himself stiff. He looked at his watch and saw that it was twenty minutes to eight.

It was at that moment that the telephone bell rang.

He crossed over to his desk and took up the receiver.

"Is that you, Jack?" came a feminine voice from the other end.

He grinned.

"Yes, it's me," he said, ungrammatically. Well, his name was Jack, so what did it matter?

"For God's sake come!" said the voice, unknown to him, and tremulous with fear. "My husband has broken out again, and swears he will kill me, for God's sake come!"

"Good Lord!" said Jack. "Kill you! Why, who are——?"

The voice cut in on his words. "He is in the hall, waiting, I can't get out, the garden door is open, come that way, to the dining-room window. Oh! say you'll come, say it, quick—quick!"

The tone was that of agony. Jack Denham felt a tingling of horror in his veins.

"Where?" he said quickly, and then added: "I've forgotten the address."

"Oh! you know, Staveley Road, eighteen.

Come *now*, I shall die of terror. The servants are out. Oh! My God! Jack, say you'll come . . ."

"Of course I will," he said. "This minute. I'm starting now."

He rang off and then stood staring at the instrument vacantly. What on earth did it mean? A woman in fear of being murdered by her husband, and calling to him! Who was she? He did not know Staveley Road —had never heard of it. But whoever she was or whatever it might mean, in his code of life there was only one thing for him to do. A woman was crying for help in her hour of need, and he was a man, therefore he must go to her. Of course he could ring up the police, but that did not seem the right thing somehow; she could have done that, and had not; she had called to a man she knew instead. Therefore she had a reason. Of course the explanation of the seeming mystery was simple enough. Exchange had put her on to the wrong number. She in her terror had not noticed the strange voice; that he had answered to the name of Jack was enough for her, and that she, a helpless woman had called to Jack was enough for him. Here at last was what he had craved, an adventure. He picked up his hat and hurried downstairs. He looked up and down the street, not a taxi visible. He ran into Oxford Street at last, commenting angrily on the scarcity of taxis. A slight drizzle and the hour however accounted

for it. At last a few yards further on he saw and hailed an empty car.

"Where is Staveley Road?" he asked the man.

"Somewhere out St. John's Wood way, sir," was the reply.

"I want to get there," he said. "Drive as fast as you know how."

"What number, sir?"

"Never mind the number," he replied, and got in.

He reflected that it would be wiser perhaps to get out when he reached Staveley Road, and find the number himself.

The man drove with the utmost speed the crowded streets permitted, and Jack seated inside, fuming at the delays. What on earth was he going into, and what did it mean? He pondered over the message—"Broken out"—that implied drink, he supposed. He pictured the brute sitting in the hall, and the terror-stricken woman cowering in her drawing-room waiting for a sound, a movement, and he shuddered.

At length the traffic grew less congested and they tore on. Black clouds overhead made the streets unusually dark. Once more he glanced at his watch. It was eight o'clock, and he put his head out.

"Are we anywhere near?" he asked.

"Just turning into Staveley Road now, sir," said the man.

"All right, pull up." He got out and put

a ten shilling note into the man's hand. "Keep the change," he said, "you've earned it."

"Much obliged, sir," said the driver, and moved off down the road.

Jack Denham looked at the house where he was standing. It was No. 80, and was detached and standing in a garden, then came a row of houses. He walked quickly on. At No. 30, the row ceased, and the houses became once more detached. These, he noticed, were of good size, each with its own large garden. He reached No. 18 at last, and found that it boasted three doors—a front entrance, a back, and a garden gate, which stood unlatched. He pushed it open and walked down the path that led round the side of the house, which was in complete darkness. Presently he found himself treading on grass, then he paused and listened. There was not a sound save the far distant rumble of traffic.

He moved on and stumbled against a step. There were three steps, up which he went. and found himself standing on a stone terrace. Close in front of him was a french window, partly open. Then he heard a man's voice inside——

"What was that?"

It was a harsh voice, an unpleasant voice. He pushed open the window, felt some heavy curtains impeding his progress, and pushing them aside stepped into the room. A blinding glare of electric light dazzled him, and for

the moment he saw nothing. Then once more came the voice, harsh, insistent——

"Draw the curtains, you blithering fool, draw them quick."

He stopped, staring blankly at the scene before him. It was a large room in the centre of which was a table, and round this were gathered six men and two women all in evening dress, and every face was turned towards him. Then with a quick movement the man who had spoken sprang towards him, closed the window and drew the curtains.

Jack took in the scene at once. Evidently this was a gambling place, for they were playing baccarat, and evidently also, he had come to the wrong house. What he had taken for eighteen, must in reality have been eighty. Then the man beside him, a tall, strongly built fellow with clean shaven face, large heavy features and cold grey eyes, spoke to him.

"The password," he said, shortly.

"I beg your pardon," said Jack. "I'm afraid I have made a mistake."

"I'm afraid you have," was the reply, followed by a short laugh, an ugly laugh, seemingly full of menace.

There was a stir among the people seated round the table, chairs were pushed back. A middle-aged man with pointed beard and the look of a foreigner, detached himself from the others and came towards him.

"You have the password, *hein?*" he asked,

abruptly. "The password, my friend, is it not so?"

"I don't know what you mean," said Jack, drawing back involuntarily.

There was a murmur from the others. A slight, pretty woman in the scantiest of garments and blazing with imitation jewellery called out:

"He is not one of us, Gaston. Is the window shut?"

With a quick movement the man who had first spoken drew a wooden shutter over the window and rammed down the bar across it. Then he turned to the young man, who now realised fully what he was up against, and, as was his way, with the advent of danger came complete composure.

"You have no password," said the man, "and yet you are here. How did you come?"

"Through the window," said Jack.

Someone tittered.

"An unusual proceeding for me, I admit," he went on, with a smile. "As a rule I use the door, but on this occasion I had a reason."

"You are from Scotland Yard, I suppose," said the tall man with a frown.

"God forbid," was the reply. "But let me explain, it is imperative that I get out of here at once."

"You realise where you are, I suppose, and that this is a gambling den?" said the man.

"Not really, is it?" retorted the other. "Why, I thought it was a Mothers' Meeting."

Again there was a titter from one of the

women by the table, and the foreigner, Gaston, frowned.

"This is no matter for joke," he said, angrily.

"So it seems," said Jack airily. "Since you appear to be in dread of the police, it strikes me that it might possibly be quite serious. But I can assure you that I am not connected with the Force in any way. Now, I ask you," he went on, turning to the rest of the company, "do I look like it?"

Once more someone laughed, and the pretty woman came nearer.

"Who are you?" she asked.

He bowed. "Madam," he said in mock politeness, "is it not better that we both remain incognito?" Then he turned to the big man. "Would you be so kind as to unbar that shutter, and allow me to retrace my steps the way I came. Rather a lot depends on my going at once."

"I should imagine so," was the curt reply. "But not yet, my friend. There are certain things to be gone into before we part." He waved his hand towards the table, and a young man went to the door at the further end of the room and locked it, putting the key in his pocket.

"This begins to look distinctly interesting," said Jack. "May I smoke?"

"My! You've got a nerve," said the pretty woman.

Jack offered her his cigarette case; she took one.

"Anyone boast a match?" he asked, looking round.

The young man who had locked the door, laughed, and threw a box over to him, which he caught.

"Thanks awfully; matches are the bane of my existence. I never can find one when I want it."

"Now," said the big man, who had been waiting impatiently through this conversation, "supposing we cut this foolery and get to business?"

"Go ahead," said Jack. "I'm listening intently."

"Before you go," went on the other, "you will, of course, give your assurance that you forget where you have been, what you have seen, and other details such as the name of the street, the number of this house?"

Jack Denham did not reply. He stood there, thinking hard, and they were not pleasant thoughts. In the first place, why should these people be so desperately anxious for him to hold his tongue? This was certainly a gambling hell, but to his knowledge and experience, a good deal of gambling went on in London. Was this something more? Undoubtedly it was, and that being so, he was in a pretty tight corner. He glanced round at the occupants of the room. There were six men and two women. Of the latter one was young, amazingly pretty, a very effective decoy no doubt; the other, middle-aged, homely,

eminently useful as a respectable caretaker in the event of a sudden evacuation of the premises. His quick eyes sought the faces of the four men standing round the table. The two beside him he had already docketed in his mind as the leader and second in command. For the rest, the young man who had thrown him the match-box looked a gentleman, but what of that ? The present day criminal was no longer of the Bill Sikes type, this young man looked what he aped, a gentleman, or perhaps he was one, more's the pity. He would know him again anywhere. Beside him stood a tall man with drooping moustache ; there was something peculiarly low and evil about him, about the furtive look of the eyes, the nervous twitching of the fingers as he took up and dropped a card, then another. And on the other side two more, one of medium height, thin with a sallow complexion, clean shaven and a mouth twisted on one side, either a physical defect, or the result of a cut ; this last more typical of his idea as to what a clever crook should look like. Small, wiry, cat-like in his movements. He had seen him cross the room to the sideboard and pour out a drink for himself. He had the face of a weasel with little cunning eyes, and could see as though in a vision those long sinewy fingers manipulating deftly and effectively the tools of his trade. Was this a gang of crooks unknown to the police ? Was this the solution to that hitherto unsolved problem of the

many clever robberies that had taken place recently in London and in country houses? Was that young man a member of society as well as a member of this gang, and he the means of so many mysteriously unlocked doors and opened windows, and the almost impossible getaway of the thieves unless with inside help? If so, whether he gave his promise or not, Jack Denham realised pretty clearly that his number was up, unless they stuck at murder. Well, he had to chance it. He was no fool, and he had to get out of this place if that woman was to be saved, if indeed, even now he was not too late. He must give his promise, and whether given under threat or otherwise, to him a word once given must be kept.

"Come," the harsh voice of the leader at his side broke in upon his thoughts. "Are you going to give your word to say nothing to the police of what you have seen, or are you not?"

"You seem to be terribly afraid of the police, gentlemen," he retorted. "Why?"

"What 'fools question'!" ejaculated the Frenchman. "Can you not see? *V'la.*" He pointed to the table.

"Oh! of course, yes," replied Jack carelessly, "I see. Well, if it will ease your minds, I most certainly will give my promise. There's no reason that I know of why I should want to get you into trouble, and there's every damned reason in the world why I should

want to get out of here." For it had occurred to him that in coming here he must have actually passed the very house he wanted to get to, it must have been 80, Staveley Road, not 18, and there might be a chance of saving her yet.

"What! Are you going to take his word and let him go?" It was the little man with the weasel face speaking, and there was unutterable scorn in his rather high-pitched voice. "Take his grandmother. Don't you be a fool, man Sullivan." He looked at the big man angrily.

"Shut up on names, you blinking idiot," growled the tall man with the moustache.

"What do names matter? They ain't in the police registers, are they? But they will be if you're such a cursed fool as to let that chap go alive out of here. You can take my word for that," said the little man sharply.

"Who is head of this show, Alf, you or I?" asked Sullivan, quietly.

"There won't be no show to talk about if you let that fool go," was the retort.

"*C'est vrai*—'e ees right," put in Gaston, and then to Jack: "You give your promise, *hein?* It is easy, and hey presto! when you are out, you, what you say—'phone to the police, and give us away. We are not fools, no, it is you who are the fool."

"I assure you I won't," replied Jack, who, under a bold front was beginning to feel his heart quake within him. "And don't be

rude, my good fellow. I have given my word, and my word once given, I never go back on it. Why should I? I want to know nothing more about you. I came in by mistake. All I ask is that you let me out now and I'll keep my mouth shut. If you refuse, it will show you have something to be afraid of. You can take it from me I've been in a gambling den before now, and thoroughly enjoyed it. I'm not the man to give you away."

The pretty woman leant forward across the table.

"I think you can trust him, old man," she said. "Let him go."

"You shut up," growled Sullivan, and then walked across to the table leaving the Frenchman on guard. But Jack, even had he thought of rushing them and trying to escape, knew that it was useless. The door was locked and the window shuttered and barred. He recognised that his position was desperate.

"Look here," said Sullivan, "I'm inclined to agree with Gaston, but mark you, I won't be dictated to by anyone." There was a murmur of assent.

"Right you are, gov'n'r," said the little man. "We're here to obey orders of course, but since we've all got something to lose if things go wrong, it's only fair that we should all have a say, ain't it, pals?"

"Most decidedly," said the young man, his voice, Jack noticed, was refined and cultivated

"Very well then, let's put it to the vote,"

said Sullivan. "Those who are in favour of trusting him, put their hands up." At once five arms, two of them were women's, were raised.

"Women don't count," snarled Alf sullenly.

"Quite so," assented Sullivan, and Jack's heart sank. "This is a man's job. Now we have Bob, Mike and Appleton for——" Jack Denham watching in dread fascination saw the arms of the young man, the fellow with the twisted mouth, and the tall man with the moustache, held high in the air. "Which means that there are three against," went on the big leader. "So that's a washout."

"Let's toss for it, guv'n'r," suggested Alf, grinning. "Heads he goes, tails he stops and gets what's coming to him." The others nodded. Sullivan produced a coin and sent it spinning. It fell with a clink on the table, spun round for a second and lay flat. Jack strained forward and felt a sudden grip upon his arm.

The pretty girl flung up her hands and cried out :

"No! No! Let him go!"

"Tails it is," said Sullivan, and put the coin in his pocket.

"I'm sorry," he went on, turning to Jack, "but I'm afraid we can't part with you."

Jack, his heart beating violently, laughed.

"Nonsense," he said. "I've got to go. I must go, and at once, time is everything to me."

"Time is of no consequence to us," replied Sullivan, coldly.

"It will be when you are doing it," retorted Jack, airily. There was a general titter.

"I not understand this joke," said Gaston, sourly.

"You wouldn't," replied Jack. "But you'll know all about it soon if you detain me here against my will. I have given you my word, and I'll not go back on it, and you're safe whatever your game may be, I'm not given to lying. But keep me here and you'll pay, I promise you that." Some of the men laughed, the pretty woman came towards him, regarding him with admiration.

"You are very brave, boy," she said.

"Not at all," was the reply. "I am not frightened, if that's what you mean. You can't hurt me."

"You are sure of that?" growled the big man.

"Not quite so sure, certainly," was the retort, "when I look at your face."

Someone laughed and Sullivan scowled.

"Enough of this," cried Gaston. "What will be done now with him?"

"To shoot him is the simplest way out of it," said the big man.

"No, don't do that," said Jack pleasantly. "Anyone, any fool can commit murder, but it's not everyone who can get rid of the body. Do, I beg of you, before you start in on a shooting stunt, remember the body."

"You laugh at us?" cried the foreigner, shaking his fist suddenly in Jack's face.

"Of course," was the reply. "You didn't expect me to cry, did you? You're so funny, you know, talking calmly about shooting a fellow in the middle of London. It isn't done, really. In my opinion, it's hardly what one might call good form. Besides," he added placidly, "my big brother returns to my rooms at midnight, and if I am not there, he will search London for me. He has a pal at the Yard. You know where that is? On the Embankment. I—er—took a taxi here from my house, they'll soon fish me out, dead or not dead, and if not dead, so much the better for all of you. Do I make myself quite clear, or are there any details you would like to have explained?"

"I suppose all this is true?" demanded the big man.

"I have already told you that I do not lie," said Jack, conscious of the fact that he had done so pretty badly regarding the taxi. As a matter of fact no one on earth could trace him the way he had worked things. Unconsciously, certainly, but nevertheless desperately dangerously for him at the moment. No one knew he had left his rooms, or even that he had been there. He had picked up the taxi in Oxford Street, and he had left it at the end of Staveley Road.

"I believe the fellow is lying," said the young man. "I heard no taxi draw up here."

"If you were a little nearer," said Jack, "I would take infinite pleasure in knocking you down for that."

"Come," said the big man. "What is to be done? You know the situation and what it means to us."

"Shoot him and be done with it," said a voice, Alf's.

"No, no!" cried the pretty woman, the other close beside her screamed. "You must not hurt him," she went on, "there are other ways if you will only think."

She came over to Jack, who now felt his arms gripped by the two men on either side of him. She put her hands on his shoulders.

"You do give your promise," she whispered, "and you will keep it, won't you, boy? I don't want anything to happen. Swear it."

"I have given it," said Jack, "and I'll add this to seal the bargain," and bending forward he kissed her frankly on the mouth.

"Oh, please!" she cried. "Please!" and turned to Sullivan.

"What, more?" said Jack. "That's greedy, but here's another," and he kissed her again. "What scent do you use?" he then asked, sniffing the air.

"Heliotrope," was the reply. "But don't be silly, this is serious."

"Then don't use so much," said he. "It isn't done among the best people."

Again she turned to Sullivan.

"You'll let him go?"

"It don't look like it," said Jack. "These two prize-fighters of yours appear to have taken a violent affection for me, and nothing will induce them to part from me."

The woman regarded him for a moment, honest admiration in her eyes. She had seen Sullivan smile too. Perhaps there was a chance, if she could play her cards well.

"I'm glad you kissed me," she said. "But you owe me for them all the same, and now you pay."

Then with a laugh she thrust her hand into his breast pocket and pulled out his leather case.

"Full and fat!" said she, with a glance inside. "I'll keep it for remembrance when you've gone. You don't mind, boy?"

"A pleasure, of course," said he, airily. "It's a pity it's not fuller. It will, at least, pay your expenses to gaol." And he smiled at her; then after a pause: "I'm sorry you took it, though," and turned his face away from her.

"You have quite done with this—badinage, *hein?*" asked Gaston, turning to the lady. There was no relenting there, fear seized her again.

"Can I do nothing?" she said hopelessly. "Oh, what are you going to do?" She turned to the others, and clasped her hands.

"You must be quick, you know, for the guests will soon be here, and they must not know," put in Alf, and added a curse.

"No, poor beggars!" said Jack. "It will

quench their ardent desire to be robbed, won't it ? "

" Silence," said the big man, angrily, and pulled an automatic from his breast pocket. The woman screamed and threw herself upon him.

" Get out of my way, Molly, you infernal fool," he growled.

" No ! " she cried. " You shall not. There shall be no murder here. We may be thieves, but we have never killed anyone yet."

" That's right, give the whole show away, won't you ? " cried Sullivan, and struck her violently across the face.

" You damned swine ! " cried Jack, and struggled powerless in the grip of the two men. " Let me go, curse you, you've knocked her down."

" 'Pon my word, I'm with you there," said the young man, crossing quickly to where Molly lay sobbing. " I don't stick at much, but I bar striking a woman." He raised the girl and put her into a chair.

" Then she should keep her —— tongue quiet," retorted Sullivan. " And now you stop that, you fool."

For Jack realised at last that they meant to kill him. He had asked for adventure and excitement and now he was having his fill of it. This particular brand, however, was hardly pleasant. Anger seized him, fear and a desperate desire to live. With a sudden violent movement he freed his arms from the

restraining grip and struck out at the Frenchman. The man went down under the blow on his chin.

"You damned cowardly brutes," he cried furiously, turning to resist the onslaught of three more.

It was hopeless from the first; the women cowered back as they watched the unequal fight, and then he was down, panting and breathless, with one man on his chest, his arms held.

The Frenchman, dazed from the blow, picked himself up slowly and staggered to his feet.

"For me the *coup de grâce*," he said jerkily, and held out his hand for Sullivan's weapon. "I receive the knock out. I return him." Sullivan drew back.

"No," he said. "Molly's right. There must be no shooting here, we can't afford a noise. We must think of something else."

"Why not give him a cyanide pillule, guv'nor," suggested Alf, "and prop 'im up outside a doorway. Suicide whilst of unsound mind."

"Dry up, you blinking little fool," snapped the young man, called Bob, coming forward quickly. "Look here, Sullivan, I stick at cold-blooded murder. The fellow's a gentleman, and he gave his word, after all."

Then Molly, red-eyed, came forward and put her arms round the big man's neck.

"You owe me something for that blow, my dear," she said. "Give me his life."

"What's he to you?" snarled Sullivan, turning on her.

"Nothing, Jim, only a brave man. You're that too, you know. Let him live. We don't want murder on our consciences, if we've got any. Take him out into the country and leave him there, and meanwhile we'll get out of this. Not that he'll tell, for I know he won't."

"That's a good idea, Moll," agreed Bob. "Don't you think so, Appleton?" He turned to the man with the moustache, who nodded.

"It's better than guns or poison," he said.

"Yes," agreed Mike. "I don't like the idea of murder."

"Well," said Sullivan, after a pause, "I admit I owe Moll something, and as you three are agreed, I'll do as you say. Go and get the car, Appleton. We'll see to him." Then he turned to Gaston:

"Strap him up and gag him," he said curtly. "As you are a sufferer at his hands you shall have that pleasure." The Frenchman grinned.

Sullivan touched Jack with his foot.

"Stand up," he said.

He obeyed without protest, for he knew the game was up. He knew that whatever they might say, these men would never let him go alive. They meant to take him into the country and kill him there. The poor girl, Molly, didn't know this of course, but he did. It was not likely or in reason to suppose that Sullivan would change his mind as rapidly as he had done without some motive.

He had to keep the girl quiet, and he had to take no risks. There would be less risk if the thing were done out in the country, and Molly herself had supplied him with the idea, which he had seized upon. He looked round and saw the Frenchman coming towards him, an evil grin on his face, and presently he found his wrists strapped tightly behind him.

"You're going to kill me of course," he said, and looked Sullivan squarely in the face. The big man laughed.

"Shut his mouth for him, Gaston," he said sharply. Jack Denham jerked back his head as the Frenchman's hands touched it, but it was useless. A broad piece of thin rubber was stretched tightly across his mouth and fastened behind his head.

"If you open your mouth," said Sullivan, "it will go inside, and rubber don't taste particularly nice, I reckon. So you'd best keep it shut."

Then a cord was lashed round his ankles, and he swayed forward. The young man named Bob caught him.

"Steady," he said, and held him firm.

"Jim." Molly touched Sullivan on the arm. "You gave me your word. You gave me his life, remember." There was desperate anxiety in her eyes. Jack watched her in a kind of wonder.

"That's all right, old girl," said Sullivan, pushing her aside. "Don't you worry. Bring him along. Alf, take his legs, I'll carry the

shoulders. We'll go straight home, Gaston, after we've got rid of him. It won't be safe to come back here, his people may be looking for him and get on to his tracks. The rest of you clear up, leave Lizzie in charge, and come along as best you can."

They carried Jack Denham through the door into a dark passage and out of the house. A big car stood at the gate and into this he was placed hurriedly, Sullivan seated beside him, Alf with the driver, Appleton in front. They started. He lay back feeling suddenly sick and faint, he had had nothing to eat since luncheon and the smell of the rubber round his mouth nauseated him. He was young and life was very sweet. The bravest man, and he did not lack courage, might have been pardoned the sensation of fear and horror that assailed him then. During that nightmare drive his thoughts ran riot. That poor woman, what of her? He had failed. Would she ring up the other Jack, and would he get to her in time? He thought of the elder brother he was to have seen that night—the brother who had told him so often that his insane love of adventure would one day carry him too far, and how right he had been. Into what vile den of thieves and criminals had he inadvertently gone? Well, regrets were too late now, he just had to face it. He always had faced things and he would not turn coward now.

They drove fast, London was left behind, and they were out in the country on a smooth

road. Then they turned abruptly down a rough lane with trees on either side, and the car drew up. Sullivan bade him sit forward while he tested the bonds at his wrists and tightened the fastening behind his head. Once more Alf took his legs, Sullivan his body and he was lifted out. He shivered as a cold damp air struck him and he realised that it was raining. They carried him across a field and laid him down and he waited for the bullet that was to end his life. He saw Alf turn away and peer through the darkness in the direction from which they had come. He noticed that his hand which held the electric torch shook suddenly.

Sullivan stood over him holding the automatic in his hand.

"Are you ready?" he asked abruptly.

Jack Denham nodded his head in acquiescence, his eyes staring unflinchingly into those of his would-be assassin. For a moment, which seemed to the helpless man like a year, there was silence.

Then Alf turned quickly.

"Say, guv'nor," he said, his high-pitched voice scarce above a whisper, "how about the noise? Wouldn't it be better to bash in his brains with the butt end?"

Sullivan turned upon him.

"If you had ever known me to go back upon my word, would you trust and obey me as you do?" His voice was low, but every word cut like a knife. The little man cringed.

"No, guv'nor, of course not."

"Very good. Then, as there's nothing more for you to do, at present, you can get back to the car."

Alf placed the torch on the grass and slunk off without a word. Sullivan turned to Jack. "I'll do you the justice to admit that you're an uncommonly brave fellow," he said, slowly. "And it's partly that, and partly a woman you have to thank that I don't waste a bullet on you. I gave her my word and I never go back on that. You have given your promise to keep your mouth shut. I'll trust you, not because I'm given to trusting people. I'm not, but because if you are set on living you'll keep it shut. For I give you my solemn oath that if the police get to know, or start in poking round after us, your life won't be worth a farthing to you or anyone else. You're the only living soul who could give us away, and if that happens I shall know who's done it. Now, you lie here until someone finds you—if they do—you'll take your chance of that and it don't worry me any; you'll get soaked through and it's cursed cold. If they do find you, the odds are you'll die from the exposure, but there's a sporting chance that you don't, and I'm ready to take it. I strongly advise you to lie still and not try to move about, there's a deep pool of water close by you, and if you fell in you'd drown. By the time anyone finds you, if they do, we shall be safe, so don't worry about us. By the way," he

went on in a change of voice, "you kissed that girl twice if I remember rightly; well, she happens to be my woman, so I owe you for those kisses." Then very deliberately he raised his heavily shod foot and with all the force he had kicked him twice in the ribs. At the second kick Jack heard a crack, and a violent pain forced a groan from him.

"Ah!" said Sullivan with a laugh. "That will take some mending. So long." He stooped down, picked up the torch and strode off into the darkness.

Jack Denham lay in agony. The first kick had been bad enough, the second, he knew had fractured a rib, if not two. The pain of it shot through his body in fiery darts, to breathe was torture, and the rain came down and beat upon his helpless body, soaking him through and through, numbing him with its pitiless cold and wet. He could think of nothing now but the merciless pain that racked him. An intolerable thirst parched him. If he could get his face to the ground and move that horrible rubber band perhaps he could get at the pool beside him. He moved, tried to turn, and lost consciousness.

Tommy Baker, aged four, having finished his breakfast, and seeing that the rain had stopped, left off teasing the cat and betook himself to his beloved fields, now in a condition to ensure his becoming exquisitely dirty, and made a bee line for a certain pool, which,

being particularly muddy, was calculated if properly manipulated to cover him with more mud than was to be obtained elsewhere with such a minimum amount of trouble. Near the end of his journey an aeroplane overhead, attracted his attention, and, stumbling over some object close by the pool he fell headlong. He picked himself up and saw that the obstacle was a man, lying full length, his eyes very bright and shiny staring up into the sky, with a funny brown thing over his mouth from behind which more funny sounds were coming. Then as he watched, open mouthed, the sounds ceased, the eyes closed, and a grey pallor came over the face. Tommy, suddenly frightened, began to cry loudly and tore back to his mother, who was cleaning the doorstep of her cottage which stood on the high road.

"Well, and what now?" said she, stopping in her work.

"There's a man," said Tommy, pointing across the field. "He's deaded. There's somefing on 'is face and 'is legs is all tied up and I'm frightened."

Whereupon Mrs. Baker, being very busy, threatened to smack her offspring if he told any more of his lies. But Tommy insisted, and was evidently so thoroughly frightened that Mrs. Baker thought there must be something in it. If so here was a chance to be, so to speak, in at the death, and the first to broadcast the horrible news. So she started off across the field at a run. She found the

man, and going down on her knees in the sopping grass saw that his eyes were open, but that he appeared to be unaware of her presence. Mrs. Baker had a kind heart, and moreover was a woman of common sense.

"Lor lumme! You pore thing," she cried. "Whatever brute could 'a gone and done this?" She unfastened the rubber band, untied the ankles, and tried to turn the sodden figure over. A cry of exquisite agony burst from the parched lips, once more the eyes closed and a leaden pallor dyed the face.

"My Gawd! 'e's been 'urt." She sprang to her feet and tore across the field to where she knew her husband was working on the road. Four excited men returned with her, the fifth starting off at a run to the police station.

Ten minutes later Jack Denham, still unconscious, was in her cottage, wrapped in blankets, a sergeant of police and a constable bending over him.

"Do you know who he is, Mrs. Baker?" asked the sergeant.

"That I don't. 'E's a gent by 'is clothes," she said. "Better look in 'is pockets, sergeant."

A crumpled envelope was found, on which some notes had been scrawled, and "Jack Denham, Esq.," read the sergeant. "No. — Lennox Street."

"As far as I can see there's a rib broken, and the rest's caused by exposure."

"'E's deaded," yelled Tommy. "'E's deaded and I'm frightened."

" Pore young feller," said Mrs. Baker, putting her hand on the damp forehead, and then : " 'Ere you, if you don't stop 'ollering, I'll twist your neck for you."

John Baker grinned at the sergeant's face of disgust.

" Never you mind 'er," he said. " She don't mean it, a better 'earted woman don't live than 'er, she wouldn't 'urt a fly."

" We'll take him as he is," said the sergeant brusquely. " His friends will return you the blankets, Mrs. Baker, and no doubt make your trouble worth while."

" As if I ever thought abaht that," said she indignantly, and to do her credit, she never had.

" I'll take these straps and rubber band along to the station later," said the sergeant, " they may help us find who did this." They carried Jack Denham into the police car and took him to his rooms. He was muttering in delirium when the door opened and Edward Denham bent over him.

" Good God ! Jack ! " he said. The sergeant noticed the semblance between the two, though he put this one down as ten years older. Briefly he explained the situation, and Jack was taken upstairs.

" Been saying something about Staveley Road," said the sergeant, as he stood by while Edward Denham rang up his doctor. " And something about a woman being murdered, couldn't make nothing of it."

" I'll find out if I can and ring up Harper

at Scotland Yard," said Edward. "I know him personally. Here's something for you, sergeant, and will you take these blankets back to Mrs. Baker and thank her for what she has done? If poor old Jack gets through this, it will be her prompt action that has saved him. Kindly give her this." He put a five pound note in an envelope and gave it to the sergeant.

"Thank you, sir, I will and I'll get back to the station and report. Anything we hear will be sent on to Inspector Harper. Good morning, sir."

Dr. Watman, an old friend of the Denhams, shook his head, as he came out of Jack's room.

"I'll get a nurse at once, for day and another for night. Stop by him until one is here; he must not move, and it's likely he'll try to get up. There's something on his mind, try and see what you can make of it."

Edward sat down by the bed, his heart as heavy as lead. This brother, though he would have died rather than own it, was the apple of his eye, and his only living relative.

"She wants me——" the husky voice beside him made him start. "Jack! come—he will murder me. He's killing her—and I can't go to her. It's number 80, not 18. Is she safe? Oh! don't let him strike her—he's knocked her down and I can't—I can't. They've trapped me—they'll kill me. Is she safe?"

"Yes, yes, old fellow, of course she is,"

said Edward, catching the clutching hand and patting it. "No. 80, where, old fellow, tell me where if you can."

Jack's head turned and bright eyes stared vacantly at his brother.

"She rang me up," went on the husky voice. "Staveley Road—80—80—and I went to 18—they trapped me—he threw me a box of matches—" The voice trailed off into inarticulate muttering. Edward pulled out his notebook and wrote the address rapidly.

"Oh! you brutes, you've knocked her down." The figure in the bed, stiff with bandages, tried to sit up, and Edward, rage in his heart for a glimmering of the truth began to dawn upon him, laid strong and tender hands upon the burning shoulders, and gently held them down.

"Keep still, old man, you mustn't move," he said.

"Molly saved me—" groaned the voice. "I promised not to tell, and he left me there, and kicked me. Six of them—Sullivan's gang—Sullivan's—" once more a pause.

Edward straining for every word, caught a whisper—"Gambling hell—Molly saved me—he threw me a box of matches—"

The door opened, and Jenkins the servant ushered in a nurse.

"Keep him quiet, nurse," said Edward quickly, "while I go to the 'phone. If he talks tell me all you hear."

The woman nodded, and Edward flung into the sitting-room.

"Scotland Yard," he said down the receiver, and then after a pause: "Is that you, Harper?"

"No," came the reply. "Inspector Harper's just come in. Been out about that Staveley Road affair. Who is speaking?"

"Good God!" said Edward. "Then it's true."

"What's that! Who is speaking?"

"Edward Denham. Send Harper to speak to me at once."

"Right, sir, hold the line." Edward Denham waited impatiently.

"That you, Harper?" he said at last. "What's this about the Staveley Road affair?"

"Good Lord!" came the reply. "How do you come to know about that?"

"Never mind, I'll tell you afterwards. My brother knows something about it, tell me details."

"He would," the voice was ironical. "Fact is a Mrs. Allwood living at No. 80, Staveley Road, was set upon by a drunken brute of a husband; the constable on his rounds heard her cries and got in just in time. The fellow's been taken to an inebriates' home. Now what does Mr. Jack know about it?"

"My brother was found this morning by a woman, tied up and gagged, unconscious from exposure and with a broken rib," replied Edward grimly. "He was lying in a field near Barnet. They got him back here, and he's delirious and talking about a woman who rang him up in Staveley Road. I gather,

as he knows no one in that part of London, that a wrong number was put through, but hearing a woman cry out for help he went off, as he would, and apparently went to No. 18 by mistake, and got trapped in a gambling hell."

"Good Lord!" said the voice at the other end. "Go on."

"I can't make head or tail of it of course, he speaks of Sullivan's gang, six of them, and that some girl saved his life. Do you know anything about such a gang?"

"Sullivan!" repeated Harper. "I know of a Sullivan who was hanged for murder some time back, but he can't have come to life again. No, never heard of Sullivan's gang. Don't you think he's got mixed up in some sort of fight and is just talking nonsense?"

"No, I don't," said Edward. "He keeps on repeating that he was trapped and going to be killed, that he gave his promise—I imagine not to give them away—that a girl called Molly saved his life, that they kicked him and left him there. That's all I can make out. Can you send some men round, Harper, to No. 18 and find out if there's anything in it?"

"I'll go myself if it comes to that," was the reply. "But I doubt the story somehow. However, as he seems to be right about the other part of it, I'll look into it, and I'll ring you up later."

And later Edward listened to Harper's story.

"Nothing doing," he said. "No signs of

gambling or anything else. House in charge of a respectable looking caretaker, but the inspector at Barnet has been over here and handed in the things your brother was tied up with. Which doesn't help us much. We'll have to wait till he can tell us about it. How is he ? "

" Alive," said Edward hoarsely, " that's all I can say."

" Good God ! I'm sorry." The tone was full of sympathy. " Buck up, Captain Denham, he's young, he'll pull through."

And so Edward Denham, two untiring nurses and an old doctor fought death and conquered.

Many days later as Edward sat by the bed, Jack looked at him and spoke.

" Have I been talking, Eddy ? " he asked, hardly above a whisper.

" Yes, old fellow," replied the elder man. " But don't worry, you're all right, thank God, and the police got to No. 80, Staveley Road in time and saved the lady. So you've nothing to worry about."

Jack gave a sigh of relief, and then after a pause :

" Did I say anything else ? "

" Yes, lots. I put two and two together and sent Harper round to No. 18, but the birds had flown. You can tell us later all about it, old chap, don't talk any more now."

" But I must." A terrible anxiety showed in the white haggard face. " I gave my

promise not to tell, and they swore that if the police went after them, they'd kill me."

Edward looked grave.

"Never mind that," he said after a pause. "A promise given under compulsion is a washout, and in any case it's taken out of your hands now. I know so much that when you are able to talk you'll have to tell me the rest. All you have to do now is to get well again, old boy."

"You told Harper?" asked the weak voice.

"Yes, he went round to see for himself and found nothing."

"What did he say?"

"Oh! thought you were mistaken. He knows nothing of a man called Sullivan, or any such gang. Thinks you dreamt it."

"Eddy!" The older brother bent down. 'Harper's a damned fool. Tell him I said so."

Edward Denham laughed, and then suddenly choked. This wilful brother of his was very dear to him and he had come very near to losing him.

"I'll tell him, old son," he said, when he could speak. "Now, be quiet and lie still or I'll send for Dr. Watman."

"They'll think I broke my word and gave them away," said Jack, bitterly. "They'll get me now, Sullivan swore it. You might just as well have let me die, Eddy."

"Nonsense, they'll not get you while I'm alive, old son," said Edward. But his heart misgave him. This episode was closed and

Jack had escaped death by a miracle. But if what he said was true there was grave danger ahead. But he would not let his brother know he thought so.

"Give the police a chance, old fellow," he said, smiling. "I wouldn't be Sullivan's gang for a good deal, if they get on to them." There was a long pause.

"I can't help them," said Jack at last. "I gave my word, and on that word my life was spared. Besides, I can't hurt Molly. So I'll just have to take my chance."

CHAPTER II

A WOMAN'S REASON

AMONG the many passengers who got out of the morning boat train at Folkestone were the two brothers, Edward and Jack Denham. It was a hot day in the middle of July, and perspiring and fussy passengers hurrying by, loaded with unnecessary baggage, envied the two cool, self-possessed young men as they stalked along the platform, the elder with the upright easy swing of the British army officer, the other, a trifle less upright with a hesitation in the walk, a pallor on the good-looking face, that spoke of recent illness. As they passed the hissing engine, and the boat which was to take them to Boulogne came into view, a breath of strong sea air blew upon them.

"By Jove, that's good!" said Jack, and straightened his shoulders. "That'll buck me like nothing else, Eddy, but I wish to God you'd give me one of those suit cases, I'm not such scrapped goods as all that."

The elder brother took not the slightest notice, but stalked on ahead. It was only when they were on board and seated comfortably

in two deck chairs that Edward deigned to take notice of the remark.

"Look here, old son," he said. "Let's understand each other, once and for all, and then there will be no more cause for argument. You have argued about things pretty thoroughly all the way from London, and though they say irritability is a sign of convalescence, for which God be thanked, still, it becomes trying at times. Dr. Watman's orders were—no exertion, bodily or mental."

"He could have scrapped the mental part of it," put in Jack with a grin—"I've no brains to exercise."

"The truth at last, by Jack Denham," retorted the other. "However, let me go on with my harangue and get it over. He also said no long journey—hence this short trip—sea air, good food and wine, sea bathing in moderation, sleep, lots of sleep. All this, he said, you will get at Boulogne as well as you would if you went further to look for it. Those were his orders, old fellow, and I am here to see they are carried out."

"It's rot," said Jack, irritably. "I'm as fit as a fiddle. If there's one thing I hate it's a fuss."

"Most normal Englishmen do," was the reply. "But as Watman says——"

"Watman be damned," said Jack.

"Oh! you can damn old Watman for all you are worth," said the elder brother, quietly; "but you'll obey his orders, old son. So

make no mistake about that. Besides, you are not as fit as a fiddle. It would take the very strongest man a long time to get over what you went through, nearly twenty-four hours' exposure in soaking rain and east wind, and a compound fracture of the rib. You know we Denhams are lungy people, worse luck, and though I grant you that we have plenty of pluck, we are not of the very strongest, else why are we the last of our race? At any rate, grumble as you like, I think you are free from the attention of Sullivan's gang, for the time."

"I had a good look at Victoria Station," admitted Jack, "and I certainly saw nothing of any of the damned blighters."

"Let's have a look at that note again," said Edward, holding out his hand. "Came three days ago, didn't it?"

"That's right," was the reply.

Jack pulled out his note case and took from it a half sheet of paper. On it was written in type the following message:

> "Your life was spared on condition that you gave your word of honour not to put the police on us. That word you have broken, therefore you are warned that no stone will be left unturned to bring you to justice. Your life is forfeit; the note case you left behind we return. It is well for us, but bad for you that inside it were some of your visiting cards. We return these

since they are of no further use to us, and I fear of not very much more use to you. At least I kept my word to you. The best thing you can do now is to make your will.

" JIM SULLIVAN."

" I'm afraid he means business," said Edward, slowly, as he gave the note back. " There is a quiet, grim menace about that letter that is more full of meaning than columns of abuse would have been."

" It's simply damnable they can't be told that I gave the show away in delirium, and never of my own wish," said Jack, angrily. " The threat of death isn't half so bad to face as the fact that they think me the worst kind of dishonourable sneaking cur."

" Sullivan and his gang are such honourable, high-minded fellows themselves, aren't they ? " said Edward, with sarcasm. " I shouldn't worry about that, anyway."

" At least he kept his word to the girl, Molly," retorted Jack. " He didn't shoot me."

" No—only left you tied up and gagged in the bitter cold and rain, and smashed in a rib for you to make it more uncomfortable. Do you know—" the elder brother turned on him suddenly—" that you nearly went out, Jack ? "

" I gathered as much," was the reply ; " but I didn't, and Sullivan said he would take the sporting chance that I wouldn't."

" Good God ! " exclaimed the other. " One would think you admired the fellow."

"I don't. He's an absolute blackguard, but I can't set the police on his track, as I promised not to, and also, I don't want to hurt Molly. At the same time, if they try to do me in now, I'll call the bargain off, that much I promise you, always so long as the girl doesn't suffer. Now shut up, I'm going to sleep."

"Give me your passport then, and I'll get it stamped for you."

Down below Edward Denham joined the queue of travellers who thronged to get their passports visèd before the boat started.

In front of him was a small man in a thin overcoat, the collar of which was turned up over his chin, a felt hat hiding the upper part of his face. He darted through the opening with quick cat-like movement, Edward following more slowly behind. The little man held out his book, took it back, and the next moment, so it seemed to Edward, vanished. There was no sign of him when Edward once more came on deck and sat down beside his brother, who was evidently fast asleep. No second thought of the little man came into Edward's mind, only a serene thankfulness when the siren bellowed forth its ear-splitting noise and at last they were off. He would perhaps have felt less ease of mind had he known that for the last few days his flat had been very carefully watched, and that keen ferret eyes were even now watching his every movement and those of the sleeping figure at his side.

It was a calm crossing, but the boat was uncomfortably crowded, Americans, over-dressed English *nouveaux riches*, business men, all sorts and conditions sitting or standing or promenading to and fro. . . . He watched them with idle curiosity and was thankful when the long low harbour came in view, and the boat backed stern foremost into its landing place.

Immediate bustle and stir, and Jack, only half awake, stood up beside him.

"Shall be glad of some grub," he said. "This sea air plays the deuce with one's inside."

"Glad to hear it, old man, I want to see some flesh on your bones. Here come the porters."

Down went the gangway; over the way the Paris express was waiting; on to the boat swarmed blue figures. Edward felt his suit cases seized and a number was barked at him.

"Seventee-two, monsieur," said a short, unshaven little man. "I collect ze baggage and meet you at ze *douane*."

A small overcoated figure brushed past the two brothers; they were across the gangway, landing tickets given up, and away to the *douane*.

"Care to change any more oof?" asked Edward.

They stopped at the exchange bureau, and Jack put his hand into his breast pocket and swore suddenly.

"By Jove!" he said. "My note case has been pinched and I never felt a damned thing."

"Had you much in it?" asked Edward.

"No, luckily, but that blinking letter was inside."

Through the *douane*—nothing to declare. Away to the Continental facing the sea, in the hotel conveyance; little ferret eyes watching the while, and long sinewy fingers, feeling with tender touch, the soft leather of an expensive note case. A journey by the sleuth on foot to a near hotel, and after some hours, the sea again, and once more the white cliffs of old England. Not a very long stay abroad, indeed, but long enough to note the destination of two interesting young men, and sufficient conversation overheard to note that they would go no further.

The young men in question were driving rapidly over rough uneven cobble stones interspersed with railway lines, on which trains were standing.

"What a beastly looking hole," said Jack. "What on earth was old Watman thinking about to suggest an ungodly place like this?"

Edward laughed.

"It's a bad beginning," he admitted, "but if more people took the trouble to penetrate the town itself they would think it worth while. It's an old world sort of place, and especially the high town with its thirteenth century ramparts." He waved a hand and Jack looked up at immense cliffs on which were perched grey stone buildings, a church spire, a large crucifix overlooking the sea.

They crossed a bridge. A tram clanked

by laden with passengers, most of whom appeared to be hanging on by the skin of their teeth to the outside of the vehicle.

"Fancy our authorities allowing that," said Jack.

"Yes, and you pretty well go as you please here," was the reply, "except for the matter of windows which are usually hermetically sealed. However, we've got our own sitting-room, and when you are not outside, you'll be sitting by an open window, my son."

"Good old Eddy," said Jack. "English to the backbone, fresh air and all."

They swept round once more and passed a long row of hotels and apartments; here and there a woman sitting by her fruit stall.

"Splendid fruit in the markets Wednesday and Saturday," said Edward, "and cheap as dirt."

"Your knowledge is comprehensive," observed his brother.

"Aileen and her mother came over last year and we spent a rather jolly fortnight here," was the reply.

They passed the fine Casino on the left and drew up at their hotel. An obsequious manager bowed them inside.

"A pleasure to see you again, monsieur," he said.

Girls in varying degrees of undress, with shorn locks and an immense length of flesh-coloured stockings, chattered and gossiped in the lounge.

"A pity," observed Edward, *sotto voce* as he looked at them. "We don't like it really, do we?"

"If they but knew," replied Jack with a shrug.

They were shown to their suite on the first floor.

"*Dejeuner tout de suite,*" said Edward.

A waiter flourished a napkin. "*Bien,* monsieur."

"And a bottle of the Widow," added Edward, in English.

The man smiled and left them alone.

"Talking of Aileen," said Jack, as he flung himself into an arm-chair by the open window, "weren't you going down into Kent to see her, old man?"

"I was, but we put it off, of course."

Jack looked at him. "I say, Eddy, you're jolly good to me, you know, and really I'm not worth it."

Edward flushed under his tan. English to the backbone, as his brother had said, anything in the nature of sentiment must be barred at once.

"Oh! that's all right," he said, carelessly. "And as for your worth, always remember that we are the last of our race. I wish to God you'd marry some nice girl and settle down."

"What price yourself, dear old soul?" retorted Jack. "Aileen and you have been hanging on for two years now."

" She wants her fling," was the reply. " I'm fond enough of her to be able to wait her pleasure."

" That's certainly one way of being fond," said Jack. " When I meet my dream woman (I've got one, you know), I shan't wait five minutes."

Edward turned and looked at him. " I had no idea you went in for dream women," he said.

" I don't, only one. I often dream of her. When I was ill she came many times. By Jove, Eddy ! She's It ! Absolutely It ! And the odd thing is I'm sure I shall meet her one day."

" I sincerely hope so," was the dry reply. " It will be no end of relief to hand you over to her, my lad. I only hope she's a woman of strong character."

" Whatever else she isn't, she's a woman," snapped Jack. " Not a half boy, and she wears decent clothes. I wonder——" He broke off suddenly and looked at his brother. " That telephone call, did you ever hear anything more of her ? The lady who rang me up in mistake for someone else ? "

" Her name is Mrs. Allwood," was the reply. " Dr. Watman knows her, knew her mother. But of course, being a professional matter, he said nothing more. The brute of a husband died about two weeks ago."

" Best thing he ever did in his misbegotten life," commented Jack. " I wish Sullivan and his gang would do it too."

They spent a happy fortnight together, and Edward Denham saw health and vigour returning to his brother's wasted form. They bathed, they went motor drives into the surrounding country. Nothing unforeseen occurred; Sullivan's gang was forgotten. Edward received occasional scrawled notes from Inspector Harper, his friend at Scotland Yard, informing him that there was nothing to inform. Having been refused a description of the members of the gang by Jack, he had nothing to go on.

They made acquaintances here and there. One day about a week after their arrival Jack and his brother were strolling along the promenade watching the crowd of bathers, jostled by endless parties of girls and men, the former in the flimsiest attire, if it could be called that at all, most of the latter in broad-brimmed hats and exotic bow ties, when a woman, walking alone, brushed past Jack, and a strong scent of heliotrope was wafted to his nostrils.

"Heliotrope," he mused. "Now where have I smelt that particularly strong variety lately."

"Pah!" said Edward, waving his handkerchief. "Why do women do it? Especially when one can inhale the glorious scent of the sea. Disgusting habit."

"Where—where—where?" mused Jack, and finally gave it up.

Once more he noticed it, at the Casino when he was sitting in the stalls listening to Faust,

wonderfully rendered by a company staying there for the season. He looked round, but recognised no one. Only a woman was standing with her back to him, and presently she went out. He got up, intending to follow, but at that moment the curtain rose and Edward caught his arm.

"Sit down, man, what are you doing? This is the last act, and we mustn't miss that for anything."

He sat down, and later they both had cause to regret it.

Then at the end of the fortnight came a wire for Edward Denham. He tore it open and Jack saw his face go grey.

"My God!" he heard him say. "My God!"

Then Jack tore the flimsy from his hand and read the message. It was from Aileen's mother.

"Aileen met with bad riding accident, come at once."

Jack looked at his watch and gripped his brother's hand. "All right, old man," he said, "you'll just catch the 11.30 boat if you hurry."

Edward nodded. "What about you?" he asked, dully.

"Me! Good God Almighty! Nothing about me! I'll stay here and wait for you to come back. I'm sure it's not as bad as you think. Buck up, old chap—hurry, or you'll miss that boat."

"I think you'd better come too," said Edward.

"I'm not going to, then, and that's flat. This place is doing me tons of good and here I stay. You silly old ass, I'm quite safe. No one will touch me here in all this hefty crowd."

"I'll get Harper to send a man out," said Edward. "For of course I must go—I can't help myself."

"Harper be hanged," said Jack.

"I will, all the same."

"All right, then, tell the man to bring his handcuffs with him in case I give him the slip," he said, ironically. "Poor old Eddy," he added. "I'll help you pack and see you on to the boat."

Jack raised his hand in salute as the boat moved slowly from the quay, bearing away that tall, grey-faced man, who was father brother and C.O. all in one. He felt curiously lonely as he returned to the hotel.

"A lady to see you, monsieur," said the hall porter. "She is in the sitting-room."

He went upstairs, vaguely wondering. The two girls he had got to know had left the day before. He opened the door and a strong smell of heliotrope met him. He went in.

A woman rose from a chair and came towards him. He stopped, stared, stood tongue-tied with amazement and a sudden nameless dread.

It was Molly, the girl he had last seen in the gambling den in Staveley Road.

* * * * * * * *

Edward Denham spent five minutes in his flat, collecting some things, and ringing up

Inspector Harper. But Harper was not in town and could not be got at. There was no one else he could apply to, so he had to leave it.

"For after all," he thought, "he's safe enough, as he says, in that crowd."

It was but an hour's run to his fiancée's home in Kent, and he arrived at Appleby Hall in a taxi as the clock struck six. An amazed butler showed him in. To the best of his knowledge and belief Captain Denham was in France looking after an invalid brother.

"Miss Aileen, how is she?" Edward could hardly force the words from his dry lips. Once more the butler stared.

"She is very well, sir. She is in the drawing-room. Will you——"

"Very well!" repeated Edward. "What on earth do you mean?" And now his voice was loud, so loud that someone with quick ears for that voice above all others, heard it, and suddenly a door opened and a pretty dark girl, a vision in a bewitching cotton frock was standing staring at him.

"Eddy! My own blessed boy! What on earth has brought you here?"

"But good God!" he said. "What does it mean? This wire. . . ."

He tore a crumpled bit of paper from his pocket and thrust it into her hand. As she read it, she gave a cry, and the next instant had flung her arms round his neck. The butler discreetly vanished into the drawing-room.

"Oh! you poor old darling. What a vile, wicked thing to do! What devil can have sent you this?"

Very tenderly he drew her close.

"My God, what I have gone through!" he muttered, thickly.

Soft hands drew his head down and warm lips met his own.

"Eddy!" Lady Edmonton and her husband came quickly into the hall. "What on earth has happened? Saunders told us you were here."

The girl, before he could speak, held the wire up to her parent's amazed eyes. "Did you ever dream of anything quite so vile as to play a practical joke like that?" she cried, anger blazing in her eyes.

Sir George read it and handed it to his wife, then he grasped his future son-in-law's hand.

"My dear chap," he said, "what you must have gone through. But, thank God, it *was* a hoax. It's absolutely unpardonable—and I'll have it looked into at once. . . ."

Lady Edmonton kissed Edward affectionately; never a woman of many words, indignation for the moment robbed her of speech.

"Come in at once and get a stiff brandy into you, my dear fellow," said the elder man, and took him by the arm.

Edward, dazed with the wonder and joy of finding his girl alive and well, and not as he had thought at death's door, or more probably, already gone from his life, followed in silence.

"You'll see about a room, my dear," went on Sir George to his wife. "Aileen, come along and minister to his immediate wants. It's an ill wind that blows no one good, since it's brought you here, my dear chap. There are one or two people staying; you know 'em, I think, Robert Vincent, Dion Lovell and his wife, the author, you know. . . ." He chatted amiably as he conducted Edward into the large room. Edward sat down heavily in a chair by the table.

"Hallo, Denham, glad to see you," a cheery voice called to him through the window. He looked across and saw a young man, in spotless flannels grinning at him.

"How are you, Vincent?" His tone was not cordial for he had never cared for the man and was surprised to see him there. Then he drank the brandy and soda his host poured out for him and pulled himself together.

"What does it mean?" he said abruptly to Aileen. She pointed across to the sideboard on which cold meats were spread.

"Dear old boy, eat something first. I don't suppose you've touched a morsel since you left Boulogne. How's Jack?"

"Splendid, getting quite fit."

"And quite safe?" she went on, helping him to something from a dish. "No sign of Sullivan's gang?" For to her alone had Edward confided his troubles.

He swallowed a mouthful and stared at her. With her words came a sudden horrible

thought. Almost impossible of credence, but undoubtedly the solution of that wire.

Sir George rose. "Well, I daresay you'll get on quite well without me," he said, "and I must telephone to the post office and find out about this infernal wire." He left the room, and Vincent with another glance through the window strolled off.

"See you later sometime," he said, with a laugh.

They were alone. . . .

Edward turned to the girl beside him and she was horrified at the expression on his face.

"What is it, dear old thing?"

"That wire," he said, "it must have been sent by someone who wanted to get me away from Jack, and by God, they've done it! When is the next train to London?"

"Eddy!" she sprang to her feet, pale to the lips.

"Yes," he said, "it's true! I must get back at once and catch the evening boat across. Unless I'm too late," he added, with a bitterness that went to her heart. She, and only she, knew how he loved that brother.

"I'm afraid you're right," she said. "One of the gang, Eddy."

"One of the gang," he repeated grimly. He looked at the wire again. "Sent off from Canterbury; they would choose a big town of course, and any way it's your postal town."

Aileen glanced at the clock. "There's a train at seven," she said. "I'll drive you

to the station myself, and we must leave here in twenty minutes. Try not to worry, dear, they can't do much in twenty-four hours."

He said nothing ; he would not tell her that unscrupulous and desperate blackguards such as they could do many things in far less time than that.

" I'll make an excuse to mother, and you'll have to tell father all about it," went on the girl. " In fact, I think it a wise thing to do, he's such a sensible old dear."

The wire, it appeared, had been handed in by a man. The post office authorities had not taken particular notice, so many people handed wires over the counter. " But I'll put the police on to it," said Sir George, angrily.

" No, don't do that," said Edward, and then he told him why.

The elder man listened incredulous, amazed. " Of course," he said, when he could bring himself to believe that it was true and not the hallucinations of an overwrought brain. " Of course, I'll not breathe a word of this to anyone. And if you want my help at any time you can count on me, my boy. But if you'll be advised by me," he went on, " you'll take that reckless brother of yours to old Watman's nursing home. I think he's got one in some out-of-the-world part of Cornwall, hasn't he ? And chain him up, you'll have no peace unless you do. And now you must be off. Good-bye, and God grant you find him safe."

Edward Denham found himself at last on the platform, and in the distance came the roar of the train.

"Send me a wire as soon as you can." The girl's arms were about him. "I am sure—I know it will be all right, you are far too good, old darling, for anything like that to happen. And Eddy," she went on, a flush suddenly dyeing her cheeks, "when you are ready, tell me. I've had my fling and been hateful to you. I've come to my senses, and I find that there is only one thing in all the world I want now, and that is you, dear old thing."

"Thank you, my dear, for that." He kissed her tenderly. "God bless you. When all the risk and danger is over I'll come for you."

Another kiss, a look of brave encouragement, and he was in his seat, and the train steamed slowly on its way. Would he be in time, or would he not? That was all that mattered.

* * * * * * * *

"Shut the door, boy," said Molly, "there's something I want to get off my chest, and I don't want it overheard."

Jack complied and came back to where she was standing. "What on earth has brought you here, and how did you know I was here?"

"Oh, cut all that," said she. "Alf followed you across, he'd been watching for days outside your flat. I'm here to warn you. They're after you, Gaston is, and he's got a Maxim silencer on his gun."

"That's very thoughtful of him, I'm sure," said Jack. "Won't you sit down?"

"Oh! damn your fine manners. Can't you see I'm in earnest? You're in danger."

"Well, and I should think you are the last person to tell me that, considering what you must think of me," said Jack.

"Get orf it!" snapped Molly. "As if I bother about things like that—I'm a woman."

"And a very pretty one too, Molly. Have a smoke?"

She laughed. "Oh! boy, boy, you're nothing but a fool. Look here—this hotel's no place for you, lots of people come in and out. Gaston might come any minute and just plug a hole in you—now your brother's gone."

"Do they know that?" demanded Jack, serious at last.

"Of course, you silly mutt. That wire was a hoax. Bob sent it. Never mind where from, or how he knows. I'm not giving anything away. Gaston came on the boat this morning. I came last night but couldn't get at you, they don't know I'm here. You've got to get away to England, and by to-night's boat."

Jack's face went white. "The blackguardly swine!" he said. "Eddy was going through hell over that wire."

"He'll go through worse if you don't do what I tell you," said the girl.

He turned and looked at her. "What are you doing this for?" he demanded.

"Oh, you man!" said she. "As if you'd understand. It's just a woman's reason, that's all."

Jack looked at her steadily.

"You are doing this for me," he said, "and yet you must still believe that I broke my word and gave you away."

For the first time Molly's eyes sought the floor.

"Well," she said, "and didn't you?"

"No," he replied gravely. "When I was rescued the next morning, I was delirious, and in my ravings gave part of the truth away. They guessed the rest, and put the police on to you."

Molly gasped and stared at him. "Is this true, boy?"

"Why should I trouble to lie to you? Of course it is true. You see, Jim Sullivan overstepped the mark when he broke in my rib with his boot, and left me out in the wet and cold that night. Most men would have died."

Molly's eyes never left his face, and now her face went suddenly white. "He did that?" she cried, and was silent for a moment, as though thinking deeply, thoughts that had horror in them. Then she made up her mind.

"Is there anywhere you can go, now, out of this town?" she asked. "You've got to get away at once. And you mustn't cross to England to-night. Do you see?"

"No, I don't see at all," was the reply. "But we can get away from here if you say so.

We'll go out to Wimereux by train and enjoy ourselves. I'll leave my things here, and tell the manager Eddy and I will be back in a day or so. Sit down and have a smoke, kid, while I get my passport and so on."

Later the two passed out of the hotel.

Jack, amazed at this girl's goodness of heart, found little chance for private talk in the tram, for it was full—other people sat at their table during the meal. But later in the Casino they danced and she talked to him of her life, or part of it, and seemed amazingly happy in his company. At last he said they must go back, and then she begged him not to hurry, but to walk back along the cliffs. Her desire seemed to be to delay his return as much as possible, and again she told him not to cross that night. He wondered, but gave way. Together they set out to walk the long way back along the high, grass grown cliffs.

The girl clung to his arm and for the most part they walked in silence. Then, of a sudden, from behind a high tussock there rose the figure of a man, a man he recognised instantly. It was Gaston, the second in command of Sullivan's gang. There was no time for thought. He saw the man's hand go into his breast pocket, his own followed suit, but half a second later. There was a puff of smoke but no sound, and something grazed his ear. The next instant a sharp report rang out and Gaston flung up his hands.

Jack said nothing as he stood looking down

at the dead man. He heard a stifled sob behind him, but took no notice.

"I'm sorry I had to kill your friend," he said, in quiet even tones, "but it certainly is not murder." He bent down and looked at the dead man, and then turned to face the girl.

"Before I leave you, I would like to tell you," he said, still in that quiet voice, "that whatever the knowledge may be worth to you, you have led a perfectly innocent man into your very well thought out trap. I told you I never gave you away, and more than that, since then I have refused to give any description of your friends to the police, and that is why you have been able to come out here in safety. I think there is nothing more to be said."

The girl listened, her face like chalk, horror in her eyes.

"Oh, boy, boy!" she cried, trying to catch at his hand, but he drew away from her touch. "You don't think I led you into this trap? Surely you don't think that?"

Jack laughed harshly. "I don't think anything," he replied, "the result speaks for itself. Well, anyway, you appear to have enjoyed yourself with me, and I'm glad I could offer you some amusement. The anticipation of this grand finale must certainly have added spice to it all. Well, I wish you joy of the future. You can keep your Jim Sullivan," he went on dryly, "as long as you can. For after this I'm bound by no promise, and if I live, this world will not be a pleasant place

for any of you. You had better get away from this," he pointed to the dead man, "if you value your neck." He turned away, but a scream stopped him.

"Oh! for God's sake, stop—I didn't know—I——"

Jack laughed. "Take my tip and be off," he said.

"No, no!" cried Molly, stretching out her arms. "Don't go to England, boy, for God's sake don't go."

"Good Lord!" he said, with another laugh. "Do you think I would take your advice after this? Thanks—I'm not quite the silly fool you take me for. Don't try to come near me or to speak to me. If you do, I'll give you in charge."

He heard her sobbing helplessly, and turned on his heel. It was a long way back, and later, when he recalled that walk he realised that his mind must have been a complete blank, for he remembered not an inch of the way. That a woman could have done this thing! The horror of it! There was one thing only to be done, to get back to England and to Eddy.

He saw her again on the evening boat, but took no notice, nor did she appear to see him. A drizzling rain was falling as they landed at Folkestone. He crossed the gangway, and stepped aside out of the crowd, for the woman to pass. As he did so, he felt a hand on his shoulder, turned quickly and under the lamp saw two men beside him, in bowler hats.

"All right," said a high-pitched voice. "Take it quietly, my man."

He started back and the next instant there was a sharp click, and another, and his wrists were locked together.

Some of the crowd stopped and stared.

"Look here," called Jack, in a loud voice, as an official passed, "these men——"

A hand was placed over his mouth, the official came up.

"What's all this?" he asked.

"Quite all right," said the taller of the men, and pulled out a card and a piece of blue paper. "Scotland Yard," he said.

The official glanced at the card and the paper. "I see," he said, with a grin. "Better wait for the crowd to get on," and he passed on.

They took Jack along the platform a few steps and waited. He recognised the men, of course. One was the fellow called Mike, with the twisted mouth, the other was the ferret-faced Alf. He understood perfectly. If Gaston failed, they had this in store for him. But Molly had at the last begged him not to go. Why? Ah, well, he gave up thinking. They had him safe enough. No one would trouble to look into the forged warrant or printed card. When they saw two plain clothes men (it was extraordinary how respectable they looked with their false moustaches) with a handcuffed prisoner between them, no questions would be asked. And they wouldn't give him an opportunity to speak even if it

would be of any use, which it would not. He was fairly caught this time. That was all there was about it. Presently one of them took his arm and they moved on. His passports were perfunctorily looked at, and the official grinned.

"Extradition?" he asked.

"No," said Mike. "Hopped over himself and walked into us. Good night."

They passed on and took their seats in a third class carriage. He saw nothing of Molly. The blinds were drawn down, and the door into the corridor shut.

"Do you mind opening the window, Alf? It's damned hot," said Jack.

Whatever he felt, those men shouldn't know it. As a matter of fact he knew he was going to his death.

"Anything to oblige a pal," said the little man with a grin.

As the train moved off, Mike who sat beside him, tapped his arm. "I suppose you know what's coming to you?" he said.

"I think I have a fair amount of intelligence," was the reply, "which is more than you have, or you wouldn't be mixed up in a thing of this sort. I can almost guess."

"I think not," retorted Alf. "You haven't a notion of how bad it's going to be, so I'm just going to tell you. At Victoria Station Jim Sullivan will meet us."

"Awfully polite of him," said Jack.

"And his car will be waiting," went on the

other slowly. "Into that you'll get, and be driven to our house in Bar——"

"Shut up, you fool," growled Alf.

"Dead men tell no tales," retorted the other.

"Well, he isn't dead yet, so keep your mouth shut on names."

"All right, 'ave it your own way. Well, to continue the next chapter. In that house there's a place where you'll be put, and no one any the wiser. In there you'll die, not quickly, but slowly, and while you're dying you'll wish yourself dead many a time."

"Do you mind if I smoke?" said Jack. "I think I can manage, though I had no idea jewellery of this kind was so awkward and uncomfortable. However, of course, I expect you know all about that Alf, old man."

"No, I don't," growled Alf.

"Well, you will soon, and if I'm any kind of a prophet, it will be remarkably soon too, and I shall be there to see you."

"You don't seem to realise, my lad, that you're as good as dead already," said Alf.

"Oh, no, I'm not," he replied airily. "Far from it, I'm frightfully difficult to kill, as your Jim knows, who tried it, and also friend Gaston who is a rotten bad shot."

"Wot's that?" Alf leant forward.

"Quite a simple affair. He shot first," said Jack, "and missed. I shot next—and—er—missed too. After that we both concluded it was too hot for each other and went our several ways."

"What a blinking fool!" said Alf, slowly. And Mike swore.

"It was a fair fight," said Jack, "and as for your girl—she played her part well, splendidly—she ought to have gone on the stage instead of going to penal servitude as she will."

"You shut your mouth," growled Alf, angrily.

"Then get my cigarette case out and give me one, and I'll oblige," was the reply. "And take one yourself, Alf, old man, and you too, Mike of the pretty face."

Three cigarettes were lit.

"And so you are going to torture me, are you—why?" asked Jack.

"It's Jim Sullivan's idea, not mine," said Mike. "He thinks out everything, and we just do what he tells us."

"Wonderfully brainy fellow is Jim. So he thought this out, all by himself," mused Jack. "It's a pity such remarkable talents should be wasted, and so fine a figure of a man be chucked into hell at the end of a rope. I'll try and reason with Jim when we meet."

Both men laughed.

"Well, he said you were a brave chap," said Mike, with grudging admiration. "And by God, he's right. If it hadn't been that you broke your blasted word and gave us away, I wouldn't have touched this job."

"I didn't, old fellow," said Jack.

"Don't lie—it won't help you," snarled Alf. "Didn't the cussed cops round up No. 18?"

"Admitted, and found the birds flown, worse luck," was the reply.

"Well, no one knew but you."

"Right again. Really, I'm beginning to think you have a grain of intelligence after all. But I assure you, old fellow, I didn't give the show away of my own free will."

"Nah! I s'pose it was dragged out of you by red hot pincers, which of course they uses in the p'lice station."

"Wrong this time—all wrong. I was raving in delirium, brought on by what dear old Jim did to me—and let some of it out. Fact, I assure you."

"You tell that to the angels, who you'll be seeing pretty soon," sneered Mike. "You don't expect us to believe it, do you?"

"Well, to be quite frank, I don't. It would have put me all out of my reckoning if you had, for I look upon you both as the two biggest fools God ever made. No, don't knock me about, Alf, I can't hit you back, and even *you* know better than to do that. You're not as bad as Jim Sullivan, for all your talk."

Alf lowered his clenched fist and looked away.

"And now if you don't mind I'm going to sleep. I haven't got quite fit yet, and I'm tired of looking at your face, Mike."

He closed his eyes and allowed himself to give way to abject despair. Molly, after all, had told him not to go. Poor Molly, what

unaccountable things women were. And what a pity he had not taken her advice. After all he might have guessed she spoke the truth then. Well, it was all over, and now he would never meet his dream woman, never see dear old, cautious, grave faced Eddy again.

Death! It was not very pleasant to contemplate, especially the particular kind of death that fiend Sullivan had in store for him. What did it mean exactly? Torture of some kind. Starvation perhaps? How long did that take? Or was it something worse? Something done with knives or pincers or . . . He suddenly remembered with horrible vividness all the stories of mediæval torture he had read and gloated over as a boy, and wondered if it were still possible for such things to be done in these civilised days. Well, given the opportunity, which in other words meant the place, it most certainly could be done, and the fellow Alf had said they had such a place, probably underground, where nothing could be heard. Yes, most certainly it could be done. A cold sweat broke out on his forehead. Whatever happened, when they got out at Victoria he must make a last desperate effort to save himself. If he shouted aloud his plight as they dragged him along the platform surely someone out of the crowds there would believe him and not attribute it to the ravings of possibly an escaped and recaptured lunatic? With the thought came a sudden desperate hope, and he sat forward, his eyes sparkling.

The two men, watching him, guessed what was in his mind. Mike glanced at his watch.

"In 'alf an hour we shall be there. Let's 'ave a pull at the flask, man."

Alf dived into his pocket and drew out a rather large metal flask. Then he glanced at Jack.

"Like a pick-me-up, young fellow?" he asked. "You look a bit green about the gills."

Jack, his mind still on that one chance, nodded eagerly. It would certainly help to steady his nerves and he was horribly thirsty. He took the flask in his chained hands and swallowed a large mouthful. The next instant he had dropped the flask on the floor and sprung to his feet with an oath.

"Curse you! What have you given me?"

With a laugh Alf stretched out an arm and pushed him back on to his seat.

"You don't suppose we're going to have any trouble from you when we land, do you?" he said. "Talk about us being fools, s'welp me, I think you're the prize idiot of the company. There, keep quiet, my lad, it ain't poison and it won't 'urt you, only make you a bit drowsy-like. But don't you worry any, we'll help you along and no one 'll know but what you're drunk."

Mike had recovered the flask and screwed down the lid on what contents remained.

"Think it's enough," he asked his companion, "or shall we give 'im one more?"

"Lord, no! Look at 'im," replied Alf with

a laugh. For Jack, after his sudden outburst of anger at the trick that had been played upon him, had fallen back into his seat at Alf's push and now leant with his head lolling helplessly against the cushions, his eyes closed, while gradually a sensation of numbness crept up his legs and arms and he was only faintly conscious of the murmur of voices as the two men spoke. The drug, a potent one, was acting quickly. Very soon he lost consciousness in heavy sleep, and Alf, leaning forward and peering into his face, laughed once more.

"He'll do," he said, laconically.

Half an hour later the train drew slowly into Victoria Station. Alf, standing by the window, peered eagerly out on to the platform.

"Don't see Jim yet," he muttered. "Rouse him up, Mike."

The other did as he was bid. He shook Jack roughly by the shoulder and administered a sharp kick on one of his shins. With a choking gasp at the pain Jack opened heavy lids and was dragged to his feet by strong hands till he stood swaying dizzily. The train stopped.

"Come on quick, I don't see Jim anywhere," said Alf, and, each taking one of Jack's arms, they dragged him out into the corridor which was already well blocked with moving passengers. He felt sick and dazed and his head ached and throbbed hideously. He was only half conscious of his surroundings, was faintly aware of being roughly jostled, of half

falling and being dragged up, and then of a breath of fresh air on his face. Someone literally lifted him on to the platform and he realised where he was. This was Victoria Station and these men were taking him to a horrible death. He opened his mouth and a hand was clapped over it, stifling the cry that rose to his lips.

"Come on! Carry him if he hangs back," said Alf gruffly.

They were in the middle of a hurrying crowd; a porter, carrying a bag, turned his head and stared.

"What's wrong?" he said. "Sea-sick?" And then saw the handcuffs. "Ah! I see," and pushed his way on. Other people stared.

"Where the hell's Jim?" muttered Alf, as he dragged his victim on. Jack was helpless. In the cool night air the drug seemed to be taking new effect, his legs dragged under him, the will and power to call out left him. And then a woman pushed against them and he felt a hand in his pocket. She said something to the two men and hurried on. It was only later that the words she said came back to Jack and the meaning of them.

"Captain Denham on the platform! Drop him and run!"

And then Jack was sprawling face down on the pavement and someone coming behind nearly fell over him.

"Here porter, there's a man ill or drunk or something," said a crisp voice. There was

a murmur of other voices—hands lifted him. He opened his eyes and found a crowd round him—and then the crowd was roughly parted and a tall man forced his way through and the next instant had an arm about him.

"It's all right thanks," said a well-known voice, "I know him and will see to him. Harper, lend me a hand and we'll get him into a taxi at once. It's all right, old man, you're quite safe."

The crowd disappeared. He felt himself lifted up bodily and carried in strong arms. . . . Became aware that an official was questioning. . . . Heard a sharp retort and saw Harper—yes, it was Harper sure enough, though how he came to be there was beyond him—give the official a card which seemed to satisfy him. The next thing he knew was that he was sitting on a soft cushioned seat; Eddy's arm was round him and his head resting on Eddy's shoulder. They were moving, and he heard Harper speaking again.

"Drugged; getting better now. At the worst he'll have a thick head to-morrow, so don't worry."

"You saw nothing of those brutes did you, Harper?"

"Not a sign, got away easy in that crowd, probably had a car waiting. Besides I haven't the pleasure of knowing them, not even a blinking description, thanks to your brother's beautiful reticence."

"Well, get these infernal things off his

wrists if you have a key." Edward Denham spoke sharply.

"Quite a good stunt that," said the detective with a chuckle. "Passed themselves off as Yard men, I suppose. Well, they're a pair of bracelets short anyhow. There . . . how's that?" Jack felt hands at his wrists and then he was free. With an effort he sat forward and fumbled in his pockets.

"Molly put something inside," he muttered. Edward Denham pulled out a crumpled bit of paper and Harper switched on an electric torch. Edward read aloud: "You wouldn't listen to me, so I cabled to your brother. I shall tell Jim you must have wired to him yourself, so don't worry about me. If you don't understand why I have done this, don't bother. It was a woman's reason."

"Yes, she wired me to meet the boat train to-night," said Edward slowly. "Feeling better, old man?"

"Yes," replied Jack thickly. "Good kid, Molly. Poor Molly."

"Think you'll change your tactics now and describe these precious friends of yours?" inquired Harper dryly. "Or haven't you had enough yet?"

"Tell you everything," said Jack. And later back in the old rooms in Lennox Street, he did.

"One of their best men, which means worst, dead," commented Harper. "Good work, Mr. Jack. And their house somewhere in Barnet.

Well, we'll get going now. But you'll have to go back to France, Captain Denham," he went on, " or the authorities over there may connect you and your sudden disappearance with that body on the cliffs."

" We'll go to-morrow and put in another week or two," replied Edward. " I must ring up Aileen first thing and tell her Jack is safe and all's well."

" Yes," observed Harper grimly as he rose to go. " All's well until the curtain rings up on the next act."

" That's about it," said Jack Denham, gravely.

CHAPTER III

THE HUNDREDTH CHANCE

IT was a hot day in August. What little air there was came through the open window of Edward Denham's sitting-room like warm vapour. Jack Denham, yawning and heavy eyed, for he had been at a night club and had not returned until after three in the morning, stretched his arms and gasped.

"It's like a lethal chamber, Eddy." He took off his jacket, unfastened his collar and flung them to the far end of the room. "I can't stick clothes," he went on, and collapsed on to a sofa. Edward Denham looked up from the letter he was reading.

"You look," said he, "as you deserve to feel. I haven't an ounce of sympathy for you. I advised you not to go to that wretched place last night, and of course you went. What good the sea air did for you in Boulogne has all been undone by these infernal night clubs."

"Well, when a fellow's life is threatened as mine is," grumbled the younger brother, "naturally one has to try and get all the pleasure one can as long as it lasts. Any

day I might get a knife in my back or a bullet in my brain. Jim Sullivan and his gang are only waiting an opportunity."

"That's why I'm sticking to you as I am," retorted the elder man, dryly. "That's why I go with you to these beastly night clubs which I abominate like poison. Therefore if you won't consider yourself, at least you might consider me a little."

Jack Denham flushed crimson, scrambled to his feet and laid a hand on his brother's shoulder.

"I say, old man," he said in deep contrition, "what an unthinkable blighter I've been. It never occurred to me that you hated it like that. Why on earth didn't you say so? You can't think what sort of a swine I feel."

"I thought you knew that kind of thing wasn't in my line," was the reply. "But never mind, read this letter; I think you'll agree with me that it's a way out of our difficulties and this infernal heat." He handed him the letter which his brother found was an invitation to the Finlaysons' house in Perthshire for a month, or for as long as they cared to stay. They were old friends and the shooting was good.

Jack flung the letter into the air with a whoop of joy.

"What priceless old dears! This couldn't have come at a better time. What shall we do? Take them at their word and start off in the car to-morrow?"

"That's my idea," was the reply. "The

sooner we are out of town the better. I had a long talk with Harper at Scotland Yard yesterday. He says that although your description of the members of the gang ought to help, so far he has located none of them. Of course the fact that their meeting-place is somewhere in Barnet narrows things down a bit. But he thinks they have separated, for, watch as he will, he can find no trace of them. My own opinion is that they are living in different parts of London. He thinks they are still watching this house and our movements, but that the watcher has taken a room in one of the many lodging houses in this street. If we can get away from here without being seen we shall at least have a month's relaxation of mind."

"Which will do us both good," observed Jack, with a grimace. "I feel like a hunted criminal. You see they know by now that I killed Gaston, though I told those blighters who had me in the Folkestone train that I missed. I saw in the papers that the Boulogne police had given up trying to solve the mystery of his death and it's not likely any of Sullivan's gang will give me away for their own sakes. Molly knows they sent him out to kill me and I believe she would come forward with her evidence if I were arrested for his murder."

"You have a great belief in that girl's honour," remarked Edward, dryly. "She certainly did you a good turn when you were first caught, and in the second episode in

sending me that wire. But you must not forget that she is one of them, and Jim Sullivan is her man."

"She's good stuff all the same," argued Jack. "But I admit it's up to me to look out. Now they know I shot Gaston they'll do their damnedest to get me. And, mark you, Eddy, the death they have in store for me isn't a pretty one. That little swine, Alf, told me they mean torture."

Edward involuntarily shuddered.

"Don't talk about it, old fellow. It's not likely to happen to you in any case if you use ordinary common sense precautions. I want you to take it quietly to-day and get to bed early to-night, and then we'll start right off to the north to-morrow morning. I shall go round to Wardours' where Aileen and her people are staying. She wants me to dine as she will be all alone this evening."

"Good for you, old man, but I'm afraid you must scrap the brainy idea of my turning in early. As a matter of fact I promised to turn up again at the Argos to-night. Tom Wheatley will be there with his girl and her sister whom he wants me to meet."

"You can't possibly go to that beastly place again to-night, Jack," replied the elder brother, shortly. "I can't be with you, you know."

"Considering how you hate it, so much the better," was the retort. Edward rose and stood over the younger man, a frown furrowing his brow.

"Look here, old man," he said sternly, "of course I can't control your actions, I can only ask you not to do certain things that I neither approve of nor consider safe under the present circumstances, and it is for you to decide whether you do as I wish or not."

Jack stretched himself full length on the sofa and grinned up into the stern face above him.

"All right, Eddy, don't come the heavy father over me, though the part suits you top hole; it's too hot. The fact is, old bean, I hate to seem the blinking kind of rotter you think me, but I can't get out of it. I promised to go and of course I'll have to."

"The Argos happens to be one of the lowest of its kind in London," said Edward.

"But full of damned pretty girls, old soul; now you can't deny that."

"I dislike the type, though I admit their looks up to a point."

"Oh, curse it, they can't all be Aileen Edmontons, can they?" snapped Jack testily.

"Unfortunately for them they can't," was the quiet reply. "So you mean to go?"

"Yes, I'm going all right, but word of honour I'll be back at two, old son. Come, Eddy, you're not such a fool as to think any of dear old Jim's gang would show their noses there?"

"Why not?" demanded the other. "Any kind of criminal could go to the Argos. In fact from the glimpse I had of most of the men there it struck me that they would

have been more at home in convict drab than in evening dress."

"Why, you old ass, there were no end of decent chaps there."

"So much the worse for society then," was the retort. "However, you know my wishes, if Harper wasn't going out of town I would have them enforced. As it is—" he shrugged his shoulders and turned to the door.

"I'll be back at two, old man," said Jack, feeling rather ashamed of himself, but determined to have his way in this instance.

* * * * * * * *

He had been at the Argos Club half an hour and still saw no sign of Tom Wheatley and his girls. It struck him, too, that there seemed to be a new crowd there that night, and no one so far whom he knew. It was a particularly rowdy crowd too, and drinks were passing very freely. His own pockets were considerably lighter for the entertainment of some fascinating ladies enveloped in paint, gauze, and not much else; and he was beginning to be aware of the fact that he had had about enough drink himself, and, after giving the errant Tom another five minutes would, on his failing to appear, go home; when, happening to look across to the other side of the room, he saw a pair of dark eyes fixed upon his face and realised with a start that the owner of those eyes was Jim Sullivan's girl, Molly, and that she was trying to tell him something.

Now what on earth could one of Sullivan's gang be doing here? And if one how many more? Of course there was no danger; no one in their senses would attempt to touch him in this crowd, and in any case he must speak to Molly. He started to cross the room, when he saw her hand go up as though to stop him. Then he saw that she had a companion and realised that it was the other woman he had seen in the gambling den in Staveley Road. How many more were there? And had Eddy been right after all? Search as he would, however, he could see no male member of the gang there, and supposed that Molly and her friend must have gone there just to enjoy themselves. But, if so, why had she tried to stop him going over to her? And what message were her eyes trying to convey to him now? He decided to find out and gradually edged closer to where they were standing. He was within about six yards of Molly and her companion, when he saw a tall man separate himself from the crowd and go up to them. There was something familiar about his appearance and yet for a moment he could not place him. And then he realised, with something of a shock that it was Appleton, one of the gang, with his long moustache shaved off. Was he alone, or were there others? As he scanned the faces of the crowd he became aware of an unusual stir at the far end of the room . . . a sudden tense silence, and then the one word: "Police!" echoed from mouth to mouth.

Jack's heart missed a beat. Here was his opportunity! The police at hand and Appleton only a few yards away, possibly other members of the gang as well, even Sullivan himself. He looked at the door, caught a glimpse of Tom Wheatley, and over his shoulder some tall figures in dark blue. Then once more his eyes sought Molly. She, too, was staring at the oncoming police, and there was desperate fear in her eyes. Then Appleton bent down and spoke to her, and Jack saw that no others of the gang had joined him. No, he couldn't do it, not now, Molly must be got away first. She had helped him when he was in dire need and now it was up to him to try and help her. So he forced his way through the excited crowd to her side.

"You've got to get out of here, Molly," he said, and the other woman clutched his arm.

"Do you know a way out?" she gasped.

"Only the door I came in by," was the reply; "but we'll have to try."

Appleton turned suddenly, and Jack saw a queer smile on his face.

"I'm the only one, Mr. Denham, so we'd best call a truce. I guess you're as keen to get out of this as we are, so for once we'll join forces." Once more he grinned, and Jack nodded. "Come this way. There's a back passage that leads into another street. Come, you two." He took Molly's arm and pulled her behind a curtained alcove.

" Come on ! " said the other woman sharply, taking hold of Jack's arm. " I'm scared to death." She drew him into the alcove and Jack, shaking her hand off, put his arm round Molly's shoulder and drew her aside.

" Is he the only one ? " he asked, with a nod towards Appleton, who was peering through the curtains.

" Yes. When we get outside, run, boy," she whispered. Then with an oath, Appleton turned sharply.

" We'll have to get away quick," he said. " Mr. Denham, look after Lizzie, she's scared ; and follow me." He pressed a knob in the panelled wall and a door slid back noiselessly. Then he pulled Molly through, and the two others followed and found themselves in darkness. There was the snap of an electric torch, and Jack saw that they were in a narrow passage.

" Come on quick," whispered Appleton. " I won't guarantee the police don't find that door."

" Oh ! please, Mr. Denham, help me, there's a good soul," panted Lizzie in his ear, " I'm feeling that faint, I shall drop."

Jack put his arm round her and felt her weight dragging him down.

" Try and pull yourself together," he said. " You'll be in the air soon."

But the woman's weight only grew heavier, and he heard her sob.

" Stop a second ! " he called out. " She's fainting, I'm afraid." Appleton turned and

looked round, and at that moment the fainting woman caught hold of Jack's leg and he felt a sharp stab of pain in his thigh. He stooped quickly and raised her.

"Good Lord!" he muttered. "I wish you women wouldn't fasten your clothes with pins! That hurt. Now come, lean on me, we'll be out in a second."

He put an arm about her ample figure and wished it had been Molly. Already the outer door at the end of the passage was open, and somehow he dragged his heavy burden out on to the pavement. Molly and Appleton were waiting under a lamp, and he remembered that Molly had told him to run when he got outside. He would, only he must take a breather first. Odd how that woman's weight had taken it out of him. Odd too, that he felt so dizzy, though perhaps the wine . . . he had been a fool, he must get a grip on himself, and as Molly had said, run. But he didn't run, he didn't even walk; he staggered up against the wall, leant there a second and then collapsed limply in a heap on the pavement. He was then aware of Molly on her knees beside him, and of Appleton looking down at him with a smile on his face.

"Drunk!" he said, laconically. "I'll get a taxi," and he was gone.

"Drunk!" exclaimed Molly, indignantly. "You fool, he's not drunk, he's ill. Boy, boy, what is it? What's the matter?"

"My—leg——" said Jack thickly, and with

difficulty. He tried to point to the spot that was still smarting and realised with dismay that not only was the power of speech leaving him, but all movement as well. "She—pricked——" and then words failed altogether, and he lay there staring up at Molly's stricken face, aware at last of what had happened; for though his body and tongue were paralysed, his brain, his sight and hearing, were perfectly clear. It did not need a laugh from the other woman, or the sight of that which she held in her hand to explain things. Nor yet Molly's cry of rage as she saw and heard, and, jumping to her feet, tore the hypodermic syringe out of Lizzie's hand.

"You—you——" rage made her inarticulate, and the other broke in.

"All right, I had my orders. Don't lose your temper or your senses, my gal. If you go on like this when Alec gets back he'll think you've either gone dotty or turned against us, and I wouldn't be you if Jim got to know."

The warning was enough; Molly, fuming, but impotent, held her tongue. As she put the syringe into her bag a taxi came round the corner, drew up, and Appleton sprang out.

"Ah, so our young friend has thought it safer to lie down," he observed, with a glance at Jack, and, turning to the driver: "Some of these young men never know when to stop, do they?"

"You're right, sir," replied the man with a grin. "Friend of yours, sir?"

"Yes," was the reply. "We'll see him home, of course. Get out of the way, Moll." He bent down and seized her wrist. "I know you're a fool where dope is concerned," he muttered under his breath, "that's why I didn't let you in on this stunt; but if you let this chap see there is anything wrong, I'll tell Jim, see?"

"Yes," she said dully, "I see." She turned away with a shrug, she could do nothing to help him this time, and she was sick at heart.

"Better get him in," said Lizzie. "The pavement's none too warm or soft."

And Jack, unable to utter a word or to lift so much as a finger, but acutely conscious of all that went on, realised fully what he was in for, lay there, and was presently lifted by Appleton and the driver and placed inside the cab.

"Never seed such a gorner afore," commented the driver. "Comes from that there club as the police are raiding I suppose. They must do 'em top 'ole in there, guv'nor."

"They do, hot stuff," was the reply. "Jump in you two." He gave a direction to the man which Jack could not catch, and they were off.

Appleton, who was sitting next to Jack, lit a cigarette, and gave a quiet chuckle.

"Pretty neat that, eh, Liz? You were prime and no mistake. You're for it this time I reckon, young man. Not the ghost of a chance of a getaway this little jaunt."

Jack, realising that the man spoke only

the bald truth, sat there staring in front of him, black despair in his soul. Of what use now to remember Eddy's words of warning? This was the result of his own mad, selfish folly, and this reflection served but to add gall to his bitterness. He sat there staring at Molly who was opposite him. He wondered if she realised as vividly as he did that Appleton spoke the truth, and that this time he was, indeed, "for it." How cleverly it had all been planned; but he wondered exactly how, and the next instant, could he have made a sound, would have laughed at his own folly in giving so trivial a matter even a thought. What did it or anything matter now? It was merely a question of a few hours.

But Appleton, watching his victim intently, and guessing what must be passing through his mind, chose for his own reasons to enlighten him.

"Yes, it came off well, didn't it?" he said. "You see, I was at the Argos last night and happened to overhear your friend's invitation and your acceptance. I arranged my plans accordingly, sent an anonymous letter to the police, for only in the excitement of a raid could I have got you out without you suspecting. Lizzie and a hypodermic syringe did the rest. You're pretty green, young man, and fell easy. Now, perhaps you would like to know where we are taking you?"

"Steady, Alec," put in Lizzie, "don't go gassing too much, you never know, you know." The man laughed derisively.

"Don't you worry," he retorted, "it don't matter what he knows now, he'll never have a chance to tell," and then to Jack—"We're taking you to a pal's house in Chelsea. He's a good pal, and while he's away gives us the key and the run of the house. There we shall wait for Jim and the rest who will come in their car and we'll all go home together. For obvious reasons, which you will be the first to realise, I can't direct the driver to our house, so we have to break our journey elsewhere."

"Why don't you tell him what Jim's doing and why he can't come himself and take us straight home?" suggested Lizzie sarcastically.

"Later perhaps," replied the man, ignoring her tone. "There's no reason so far as I can see why he shouldn't know. He's best part dead already. What say you, Molly, my gal?"

"Anything you like," was the listless reply. "I don't care what you do, I'm too blinking tired. I suppose we can lie down and have a nap when we get there?"

"Of course, but you won't have much time for that. It's after twelve now," he glanced at his watch, "and Jim is due in about half an hour if all goes well. Ah! here we are."

The taxi drew up, and Appleton sprang out.

"Give me a hand with this fellow," he said to the driver, "he's still helpless."

The two men carried Jack between them up the two steps to the door. Appleton inserted a latch key and switched on the light as

the door swung back, and Jack was carried into the narrow passage and placed on an oak settle.

"Shall I 'elp you get 'im upstairs?" asked the driver, looking rather curiously at the supposed drunkard's face. He had seen a good many in his life but never one quite like this, and yet he could not have said in what way he differed, unless it was in that queer fixed stare. He was puzzled, and Appleton saw that he was, and made haste to get him away.

"He's been like this before," he said; "he'll come round in about an hour, don't you bother. Here's for your trouble," he pressed some coins into the man's hand, and, satisfied that it was none of his business, he turned and went, and presently forgot the incident in the search for more fares.

"Come on, get him upstairs," said Appleton, as the door slammed behind the driver. "You take his legs, Lizzie."

Between them—Jack was a light weight—they got him up the narrow stairs, and presently he found himself lying in an arm-chair in what looked like a large studio. It certainly could be nothing else, for there was a skylight and no other windows. There were easels and loose canvasses stacked against the walls and all the impedimenta of the artist. As he sat there wondering to which of the gang this place belonged, Molly came into his restricted area of vision. He saw her turn and look at him with such a wealth of misery and anguish

in her eyes that his heart sank lower if that were possible. And then he saw her turn to Appleton with a quick jerk.

"Here, give me a drink, I'm all in."

He heard Appleton laugh, heard the gurgle of liquid poured into a tumbler, and saw Molly toss off a large glass of what he supposed was either whisky or brandy, and somehow hated to see her doing it. Then his thoughts were cut short by the sound of a telephone bell, and into his range of vision once more came Appleton, and presently he heard him speaking.

"That you, Jim? Is all well?" Then, after a pause—"Hell! You don't mean that? Oh, yes, we've got him fast. Our part of the job went without a hitch. Then it's no use expecting you yet. All right, we'll get a bit of sleep." He turned round.

"Jim's had bad luck," he said. "The police spotted the car and gave chase. They got away but have to go home to change the colour scheme and number plate. He spoke from a call office."

"Did he get the stuff he was after?" inquired Lizzie, anxiously.

"Yes, a good haul, but was spotted; at least the car was, at the end, and they had the devil's own trouble to get clear. Curse the police. I suppose it's this beggar we have to thank for their activities. It's a good job we shan't be troubled by him much longer. Here, give me a hand and I'll get him on to one of the beds. The stuff'll hold him for an hour

or two, until Jim comes, anyway. I suppose you gave him enough, Liz ? "

" The usual dose," was the callous reply. " I suppose you didn't want to kill him straight off ? "

" Better for him if you had," retorted Appleton dryly, " and better for us all. I don't set up for being a saint, but some of Jim's ideas and mine don't agree exactly. As far as I'm concerned it's safety I'm after, not cold-blooded cruelty."

Lizzie gave a coarse laugh.

" You should have thought of that before you set the trap," she said.

" Orders are orders," was the terse reply. " Come on."

Jack became aware of Appleton's hands under his armpits and Lizzie at his feet, and presently he was carried from the studio and laid upon a narrow though comfortable bed in a small room. It was abominably stuffy and hot, and Appleton went to the window, drew back the blinds and opened it at the top. Then he went back to the bed, bent over the motionless figure and peered into the set face.

" In my opinion he's good for a couple of hours," he said to Molly, who had come in and was anxiously watching him. " And long before that Jim will be here."

" Yes," said Molly, " so you'd better go and set the lamp in the window as was arranged, and I'll see to my own comfort and try and get a little sleep myself."

Appleton nodded, and turned at the door.

"Put out the light, girl, and lock the door, but leave the key in as I shall want to have another look at him later."

He went out, and Molly stood listening for a moment, and then she ran quickly to the bed and bent over.

"I know you can understand what I say," she whispered, "even if you can't speak. Of course, it doesn't matter to you, but I've got to put myself right. I knew nothing of this, they never told me I was to see you, and when I did I tried to warn you. But they were too clever for me. And now it's impossible to help you. But there's one thing I can do," a sudden dry sob choked her utterance. "If Jim comes," she went on after a pause, "and means to take you away and—and torture you, I'll——" once more she broke off, and Jack saw her draw a tiny automatic pistol from her pocket. "Yes, if it kills me I'll do it, and they may hang me for it if they like; I don't care now, I'm pretty sick of life since——" She broke off and bent lower, and Jack felt warm lips pressed upon his own. And then she was gone and he was alone with his thoughts.

At best then, he could only hope for death, a quick death. Well, after all, what else? There *was* no escape this time. He wondered if they would leave his body here to be found, or if they would take it with them. And what would Jim Sullivan do to Molly when he found out what she had done? Would there

be another murder? He felt very tired, and his thoughts were not as clear as they had been. It was odd how this drug had simply deadened his body and left his brain quite clear, only it did not seem so clear now. He found his mind wandering to other things. The houses opposite. He could just see the outline of the roofs against the faint glimmer of a starlit sky, and he wondered who lived there and what they would say when they read in the papers of the horrible crime that had been committed only a hundred yards from their own peaceful bedrooms. And Eddy—God! if he had only listened to him! But of what use all this now? His eyes closed, and the agony of his mind prevented him from realising a strange fact. Until then the drug had restricted even the movement of an eyelid.

Half an hour later he awoke and passed a hand across his forehead. His arm felt heavy as lead, and his head was aching and throbbing horribly. Where was he? On a bed, fully dressed, in complete darkness and not a sound to break the silence. Then in a flash, memory returned, and with it a sickening fear that after all he was not awake, but dreaming. For when he had been laid on the bed he had not been able to move so much as an eyelid.

Now he had his arm raised. Presently, greatly fearing, he attempted to sit up, and found that he could, though his body felt strangely heavy. But he could move, that was

all that mattered at the moment. Then the question of time occurred to him. He remembered that Appleton had said the drug was good for two hours. Therefore, how long had he slept ? The full two hours ? And if so, was Sullivan here, and had Molly failed to get to him ? These torturing thoughts were agony. He listened intently for any sound that might give an answer to his questions, but the silence was unbroken. Hope came with that silence ; it meant at least that Sullivan was not here yet, and he put his feet to the floor and, catching at the brass bedstead, stood up. Yes, he could stand ! He remembered that the door was directly opposite the window behind his bed, and, not trusting his legs, he crawled there on hands and knees. Then he switched on the light and looked at his wrist watch. It was one o'clock, so he had only slept for half an hour. Then, how came it that in that short time the powers of the drug had worn off ? Perhaps that wretched woman had not given him the full quantity, or he might require more than others did. But the matter was immaterial. The factor that counted was that the numbing effects of the drug *had* gone, and at least if it came to a struggle he could die fighting, instead of being slaughtered in cold blood. He turned off the light and made his way back to the window, took hold of the two rings and gently raised it. There was no sound, and when he had raised it about a foot he knelt down and put his head out. But one

glance showed him that there was no escape that way. A sheer drop of over thirty feet on to a little paved yard. It would be suicide to attempt it. Opposite, a hundred yards away, for a mews seemed to divide them, were the backs of houses, he supposed similar to the one he was in, and he wondered in what part of London he was. Appleton had said Chelsea, possibly it was true, as this was evidently an artist's house. And then, as he knelt there breathing in the cool night air and wondering what possible advantage it could be to him to know *where* he was, seeing that wherever it was he could not possibly make a get-away out of this room, a light appeared in one of the windows opposite, remained for a few seconds and disappeared. Someone over there was awake, but it was too far off to call for help; that, anyway was out of the question. No, there was nothing for it but to wait, wait for these butchers to come and kill him. A sudden rage seized him. It was impossible, outrageous; it could not be, not here in the very heart of London. There *must* be some way of escape. Surely something would flash across his mind as that light had done a moment ago, and save him. And the idea came even with the thought.

Those two words, flash and light! That was it! If he could see the light across the mews, then the same thing applied to those living opposite. And someone was awake, or had been. Possibly had turned on the

light to look at a watch or clock as he had, and then, hideous possibility, gone to sleep again. He must act now, at once.

Back again to the door, and, taking the switch between finger and thumb, he pressed it down so that there should be no click. He knew the Morse code, but was well aware of the fact that there was not a chance of one in a hundred living across there knowing it too. Anyway, it was his only chance, and so he flashed out the signal of distress : S—O—S. Paused, and again repeated it. Six times the cry for help was signalled from his window. S—O—S. God ! Would there never be a reply ? Was his luck out at last, and was that hundredth chance to fail ?

* * * * * * * *

Geoffrey Chadbrook, Boy Scout, had retired to bed early that night on the recommendation of his mother, who reminded him that he would have to be up early if he wanted to catch the train that was to take him and the rest of the Scouts to their camp near Sevenoaks. Thus it came about that, partly because he had gone to bed earlier than usual, and partly on account of the pleasurable excitement in the anticipation of to-morrow, he slept badly, waking up every now and then with the certainty and dread on his mind that he had overslept, and in consequence missed the early train. Every time he awoke he switched on the light and glanced at his watch. The last time it was

nearly one o'clock, and once more he lay down and closed his eyes. But sleep was far from him; moreover, someone was fooling with the light across the way which bothered him. What could the silly blighters be doing at this hour? Once more he sat up staring through the wide open window. There it was again. What on earth did it mean? And now again, and he noticed that it was exactly like the other flashes, some long, others quick and short, and, yes, they were in threes, like—now what was it like? Something he had seen—like a signal. By gosh! yes, that was it—a signal. He sprang out of bed and ran to the window. There it was again, and now the full significance of what it meant came to him. The Morse code! He knew it perfectly, and the letters now being so persistently flashed across to him or to someone else, was the call for help, S—O—S. Now, what did it mean? Was someone really calling for help, or was it only silly fooling? Somehow he did not think it was; for he could not imagine anyone capable of abusing or misusing so sacred a code, to him sacred since it usually concerned a matter of life or death. At any rate he would wait, and if it came again he would answer. And it did come again, and before the last letter had been flashed out Geoffrey Chadbrook was across the room and had seized the switch.

"Carry on," he signalled, and waited.

And along came a message. Some of the letters were wrong, but he spelled it out easily

enough, and as he did so his heart thumped loudly against his ribs.

"Held prisoner, danger of death. Can you help?"

Once more Geoffrey Chadbrook replied:

"Who speaking? Number of house?"

"Name Jack Denham. Don't know number."

Geoffrey gasped, paused a moment, and replied:

"Know Captain Denham. Am Geoffrey Chadbrook. Shall I telephone police?" And the reply:

"No, for God's sake don't, will involve a woman. Come yourself or telephone my brother."

Geoffrey paused. He knew Captain Denham, who often stayed at Normanton Hall near his father's own place, and had heard of harum-scarum Jack often. Could this be a trick, one of Jack's famous practical jokes? He flashed across a question:

"Is this genuine or a joke?" And the answer "For God's sake come!" decided him.

"Coming," he replied. Then he hurried into his Scout's uniform, for he felt that such an occasion demanded nothing less. He only regretted the lack of a revolver, but downstairs in the hall whither he had crept like a cat, he supplied its place by a stout knotted stick. Though what exactly he meant to do with it he couldn't say, nor what his exact plan was to be either. At one time he thought

of going and telling his father, but considered that perhaps this strange Mr. Denham might not like that as there appeared to be a woman concerned in it. He remembered that the house had been the one directly opposite, and as he knew, being a very observant Scout indeed, that all the houses on his side and the other were precisely similar in size, all he had to do was to count them first on his side, and then, when he had turned the corner, passed the few houses there and once more turned in the opposite direction—for these houses formed a kind of oblong block—he must count them again as he went, and he would easily find the house he wanted. But then came the question : When he had found it, what must he do ? For a moment his brave heart failed him and he stood uncertainly on the pavement. Supposing the people who had got hold of Mr. Denham were desperate criminals, he might be hurt—killed. . . . Well, he could easily go back now and no one be the wiser ; he had taken the latchkey that hung in the hall and could easily let himself in. And Jack Denham, what of him ? The message distinctly said " danger of death " and " for God's sake come ! " *Could* a Scout turn back after such messages as those ? And if he did, could he ever again look his beloved Scoutmaster in the face, or anyone else for the matter of that ?

" You blinking coward ! " he muttered, and strode on manfully.

Down a side street he caught a glimpse under a light of a dark figure walking slowly and silently along. Well, any way he had a whistle and there was a policeman not so far off if the worst *did* come to the worst. He reached the house and saw a light from one of the lower windows. Once more he paused, and then, with a sudden jerk and taking a deep breath, he ran up the steps, rang the bell and knocked loudly on the door. His plan was simple; moreover, it had the merit of being the only one he could think of; if it failed, and he found that there really was trouble here, he would go and fetch that constable, that is, if he got the chance. And at the thought, once more his heart began to beat painfully. There was silence for a minute or two, and then he heard a slight noise above him. He looked up and saw a window being gently raised and a man put his head out.

"Who is there?" came a low voice. "Is that you, Jim?"

"No, it's not," replied the boy, and to his great annoyance, he knew that his voice was not steady. "Never mind who it is," he went on, "I happen to know that Mr. Jack Denham is here and I want him. Will you be good enough to ask him to come down and speak to me?"

There was a pause, and then once more the man spoke.

"'Fraid you've made a mistake," he said,

" no one of that name is here, you've come to the wrong house."

" Oh, no, I haven't," replied Geoffrey Chadbrook. " I happen to *know* he is here. And I'll tell you this, I've got a police whistle on me and there's a constable not very far off, I passed him just now. If Mr. Denham isn't down here on this step in exactly three minutes, I'll blow that whistle and get the police, see ? "

Once more silence, and then :

" What the devil do you mean ? " asked the man angrily, but still under his breath. " Be off this moment or it will be *I* who will call the police."

As the last word left his lips the door opened and a woman's figure stood silhouetted against the faint light in the passage.

" Who is it ? What do you want ? " she asked.

" I want Mr. Jack Denham, that's all," was the reply. " I know he's here, he signalled to me about a quarter of an hour ago from an upper window, Morse code, which I happened to know. He asked me not to bring the police in as there was a woman here—you, I suppose." She nodded, but said nothing. " But I don't care a thing about that, so I tell you straight that if Denham isn't here in three minutes I'll whistle for the police."

The woman looked at the eager young face and gave a queer little laugh.

" Bless your little heart, kiddie," she said,

but so low and in such a trembling, shaky voice that he only just heard it. And then she stepped back into the house, closing the door behind her.

The boy looked up at the window once more, but the man had gone, and so once more he waited, but this time at a respectful distance from the door. For if the man meant to come out and try to get hold of him, he would be in a position to make a bolt for it and get hold of that policeman. In the distance he heard the faint hum of a car, and then a noise as of footsteps in the passage behind the door. Once more it was opened, a man came out quickly, as though impelled by a push from behind, and the door slammed to with a noisy bang. For a moment the man stood motionless, staring into vacancy.

"Is that you, Mr. Denham?"

The sound of the clear, crisp voice galvanised the half-dazed man into instant action. He walked unsteadily down the steps, and as Geoffrey felt a hand gripping his own, a big car came quickly round the corner towards them. One glance decided the quick-witted Scout.

"I believe that car's going to stop at this house!" he said. "Come on." Jack Denham turned and looked.

"You're right," he said, in a curiously thick voice. "It's Sullivan! Let me hold your arm and I'll try and run. I've been doped."

As they started off along the road the big car drew up at the door and a man sprang out. Geoffrey Chadbrook was tall and unusually strong for his fifteen years; he noticed the laboured breathing of the man beside him, gathered, in his quick way that Sullivan, whoever he might be, was someone to be feared and to be run from, and suddenly put an arm round his companion's body.

"I'll help you, just move your legs and I'll hold you up."

Jack gasped his thanks and presently they turned a corner. There were shops here, all shuttered and dark, and not far off an archway leading to some back alley. Into its shelter Jack staggered and sat down on the pavement.

"I'm done," he said, and leaned his head on his hands. Geoffrey was at a loss and feeling rather frightened. By the light of a lamp not far off he could see that this man looked ghastly white and ill and the horrible possibility of his dying before help could be got assailed him. But to his agonised question came a reassuring reply.

"No, sonny, I'm all right, only feel a bit sick. I say, I simply can't begin to thank you. I——" but Geoffrey cut him short.

"Oh! stow that tosh," he said. "Look here, who is Sullivan?" He wanted to know more of what all this meant.

"Leader of the gang—criminals—murderers—" said Jack thickly.

"When he finds you've gone, will he come after you? He must have seen us."

"Yes, he will. Do you think we could find a taxi?" asked Jack.

"We might, but I daren't leave you," said the boy, anxiously.

"You're a brick," said Jack. "Let's try and go on together, I can manage for a bit longer." Geoffrey helped him to rise, and once more supporting him, they went on down the street.

"Where are we?" asked Jack, presently.

"This is Chelsea. The house you were in was No. 40, Heron Street. Ah! there's a cop, he may have seen a taxi perhaps."

"Don't tell him about—about—anything that's happened—" said Jack, nervously.

"I'd like to, but I suppose that girl stops it. She seemed glad I came," said Geoffrey, and looked hard at Jack.

"I'll tell you all about it later," was the reply.

"All right, I won't give anything away, don't worry," and the Scout crossed the road and accosted the constable.

"Seen any taxis about, constable?" he asked. "My friend's not very well," he grinned, and winked slyly, "and I want to get him home safe, see?"

The officer, a young man, flashed his light over Geoffrey and grinned back.

"There's one just brought some people

to a house down that street," he said, waving an arm. "If you run you'll get it."

So Geoffrey ran, and presently shouted, while the policeman flashed his light on to Jack Denham, and considered that he must be very drunk indeed. So drunk, that he crossed the road to have a nearer look: and as he did so a big car came round the corner out of Heron Street and drove slowly by. In it were three men and two women, and one of the men peered out eagerly.

"Steady, sir," said the constable, "lean against me till your friend comes back." The driver of the big car put on sudden speed and disappeared from view.

What the constable never could understand was the reason why the apparently very intoxicated gentleman thrust a pound note into his hand before getting into the taxi, or meant by saying:

"Thank you, officer, that's for being here at that minute." He certainly must have been very far gone indeed.

Geoffrey Chadbrook understood, however, and before the taxi drew up at the house in Lennox Street, he knew all there was to know about Jim Sullivan and his gang, and he and Jack were firm friends.

They found Edward Denham in the sitting-room, reading.

"I'm—a—bit—before—my—time," said Jack jerkily. "I said—I'd be back—by two—and it's not—that yet—is it? And—please—

give me—something—to——" The last word was lost in the noise he made in falling.

It was Geoffrey Chadbrook who explained when they had got Jack Denham into bed, and Edward who listened speechless. When he had done, the elder man took the boy's hands in both his and wrung them.

"I've no words to thank you my boy," he said, brokenly, "it's just beyond thanks. It's no use ringing up the police now and getting them on to that house, as you say they went long ago."

"And I had better go too. I told the taxi to wait," said Geoffrey.

Edward Denham took out his note case and extracted a ten pound note.

"Give that to your Scoutmaster for the good of the camp," he said, "and here's another for yourself, not in payment for what you have done—that account can never be squared—I wouldn't insult you like that, but as a small token of gratitude and respect for the pluckiest Scout it has ever been my luck to meet."

The boy was speechless for a moment, but at the door he turned.

"If he's ever in trouble again," he said huskily, jerking a thumb towards Jack's room, "mind you let me know and I'll try and help all I can."

"I will," said Edward gravely.

And at the front door he turned again.

"Do you think they'll try anything else

again, Captain ? " he asked as Edward followed him out to the waiting taxi.

" God knows ! I'm afraid so," was the reply. " And this—" he added, " is my affair," whereupon he grossly overpaid the taxi-driver.

CHAPTER IV

THE MODERN BILL SIKES

JACK DENHAM leant back in the comfortable first-class carriage, and stared with unseeing eyes at the country as it flashed by. He was on his way to Suffolk to stay with the Normantons, old friends of his brother's, but comparatively new as far as he was concerned, for he had only got to know them a little over a year ago, and he had accepted an invitation to spend a few days partridge shooting at Normanton Hall. But it was not with the Normantons that his thoughts were busy. He was thinking of the last two months and of what they had meant to his brother Edward and himself. The first had been spent at Loch Tullian, in Perthshire, the second he had divided into short visits to other friends in Scotland, and finally he had come south, spent an hour in his rooms in Lennox Street, and then taken the train to Normanton. His brother had gone to spend a week with his fiancée's people, the Edmontons in Kent, and as Jack sat in luxurious ease in the fast moving train, he pondered, with a broad grin on his face, over his brother's parting words :

"Look here, old fellow," Edward had said, in that grave tone of his, "for two months we've had no trouble from Jim Sullivan and his friends; why, I can't say, unless they think it wise to lie low; but don't you run away with the idea that you are safe on that account. You are going to the Normantons alone because I don't think they can trace you from here, and, consequently you will be, so far as I can see, quite safe anyway for the time you are there. But if there *should* be more trouble and you escape once more with your life, which, so far, by three miracles you have been able to do, remember, it will be your last escapade, and off you go for a long—indefinitely long—'rest cure' at Dr. Watman's house in Cornwall. I have made up my mind about that, and nothing shall turn me from it." And Jack's answer had been typical:

"Stow all that rot, Eddy. If those blackguards get on to me again, far from skulking behind twenty-foot walls, I shall take my life, and incidentally an automatic pistol in my hands, and go and hunt them down myself. If the police care to come too all the better for me, but if not I'll do it all by my dear little self. So just you understand, old man, that if I go to Cornwall, it will be either in a well-manned police van or an ambulance with six hefty attendants. Nothing short of that will get me there."

Edward had only smiled, but Jack knew what that smile meant, as also had many of

our late enemies some few years back to their bitter cost. Well, he wouldn't bother about that now; sufficient unto the day. . . . It was not likely he would come up against any of the gang at Normanton Hall. He rather hoped he would see something of that ripping young Boy Scout, Geoffrey Chadbrook, whose father, he knew lived not many miles away. A splendid boy that, one of England's best. With any luck at all he would still be on his holidays.

Jack Denham arrived at his destination at last. Normanton Hall was a modern mansion, built on the site of old Normanton Castle destroyed by fire some fifty years ago, and the owners, a young married couple, were in tune with their surroundings. Mrs. Normanton, fair, slim, short-skirted and bare armed, in spite of the chilly atmosphere, welcomed him boisterously in the large hall where tea was in progress among a small company seated round a huge log fire.

"Real topping of you to come, old bean," she said, "but isn't Eddy with you? I'm sure I asked your brother."

"You did; he begs to be excused," said Jack. "He is engaged to the most wonderful girl in the world, and therefore he cannot come."

"I twig. Well, sit down old boy, and stuff some muffins into your crop. There are several pals here and one more to come. Did you come by car or train?"

"Train," was the reply.

"My giddy aunt!" she exclaimed. "Did anyone meet you at the station?"

"Car No. 3 did me that honour," he replied, nodding to several waving bare arms and grinning faces that greeted him.

"Oh, well, I expect Grayson knew about it. He reads all my letters," said Mrs. Normanton, airily. "Which is just as well," she added, "seeing that I never remember if I have answered them or not. I was afraid you had had to walk."

"Which would apparently have been all the same if he had," put in a young man seated near the fire.

"What! You here, Harry?" inquired Jack, with a grin. "I thought you were doing time for that last smash of yours."

"No, they let me off with a gigantic fine. I've lived on charity ever since; I'm doing it now."

"Well, you seem to thrive on it, you greedy pig," said a pretty dark girl who sat near Jack. "Don't eat all the muffins, chuck us one over here," which Harry Brentwood proceeded literally to do.

"You've greased me all over, you blighter," said the girl, "and it's a new frock and not paid for."

"Are they ever?" asked the delinquent.

"Only by the co-respondent," put in a deep voice from the direction of the front door, which had opened without the party hearing it, and Captain Normanton, a tall, soldierly looking man came forward.

"Who have we, Dorothy?" he went on, putting his hand on his wife's shoulder. "*You* asked this crowd, I didn't."

"Well, there they are," she replied, shaking his hand off. "Look 'em over, you'll soon recognise some of them, though I admit I hardly knew Cissy in that coloured hair, and Tommy vaunts a pointed beard, under the impression, I suppose, that he now looks like an artist instead of, as formerly, a grocer's assistant."

"Hallo, Jack! How's Eddy?" asked the genial host.

"That's what I always get," grumbled the young man, "instead of 'How are you?' It's always 'How's Eddy?'"

"Naturally, he's the best fellow in the world, you're not." The company laughed.

"Take it quietly, old son," murmured Harry Brentwood, "you'll get back on him before long."

"This isn't the whole lot, is it?" inquired Normanton, as he waved a hand towards the group. "You asked another blighter or two didn't you, girlie?"

"Only one man, and he asked himself, but of course no party is complete without him. He gives tone."

"Who on earth is this prehistoric?" demanded one of the ladies anxiously.

"Bob Vincent," was the reply.

"By Jove!" ejaculated Jack. "Do you know I have never met him yet?"

"Never met Vincent? Why, where on earth have you been?"

"Well, generally I have just missed him," said Jack; "mere chance you know."

"I'm not so sure of that," put in Normanton, with a grin. "He's a rummy beggar and usually asks who is going to be there before inviting himself. I expect whenever he heard you were to be of a party, he shied off." Again there was laughter at the sally.

"Store it up, Jack, old bean," murmured Harry, "you've a fat time coming. Ha, ha! who rings without?"

"Vincent, I expect," said the host and strolled towards the door. A butler and footman passed hurriedly through and the front door was flung open.

A slim young man in neat blue serge was ushered in. Jack gave one glance at his face and sat silent, too much astonished to move or speak. Bob Vincent, the well beloved of all small parties, who had the entrée to all the best houses, was none other than the young man who had locked the gaming-room door at No. 18, Staveley Road, and thrown him a box of matches.

A chorus of welcome greeted the new-comer, many voices spoke at once, questions were poured out, thus giving Jack Denham time to think. What should he do? Appear to recognise, or meet as a stranger? His insane love of adventure and risk demanded the former, prudence the latter. Common-sense prevailing

over all, he decided to wait and follow whatever course Vincent should choose to adopt. He had not long to wait, Normanton brought the young man over to Jack.

"The only fellow in English society who dosen't know you, Bob," he said. "We told him that he had never seen you because you avoided any party of which he was a member, now confess. Did you know he would be here or not? His name is Jack Denham."

Vincent looked at Jack and smiled faintly. He gave not the slightest sign of recognition.

"As a matter of fact," he said, "Mrs. Normanton gave me to understand that I should meet his brother."

"Did I?" she cried. "And forgot to mention Jack! How priceless!" Vincent laughed.

"Well, it wouldn't have made any difference," he said, "unless it were to make me more keen on coming." He sat down and took the cup of tea offered him. Jack, still feeling somewhat dazed, sat in silence listening to the hum of voices. What did it mean? This man, the son—no, the step-son of course, of old Mr. Faringdon, for he had married twice, no one knowing quite how or where he had found his second wife, who left much to be desired—was well known in society, received everywhere, and yet the only time he had ever seen him was in a gambling hell of the lowest description. The people he had found there were a gang of desperate criminals to whom murder was a game and this fellow was a

member. Did that account then for the mystery which always surrounded these big robberies, which occurred periodically, generally in country houses, always, apparently with the connivance of someone inside? Certainly it must, and was Vincent here now for the same purpose? The Normantons were enormously rich, and Mrs. Normanton the owner of many priceless jewels. Of course, it was ridiculous to suppose that the man only stayed at private houses in order to rob them. Probably he was here quite innocently, and there was no cause for alarm.

He was certainly a wonderful actor, for he had shown not the faintest sign of surprise or recognition on seeing Jack, and yet, he must have known him as well as Jack knew him. What would he do? Obviously, whatever happened, Jack Denham's position in regard to this gang was getting more dangerous. He was the one who had discovered them, who had put the police on to them, who knew, or thought he knew their headquarters, and now to crown all he was in possession of the real facts regarding Robert Vincent. Surely, did chance offer or plans mature, his life was not worth a penny's purchase. What should he do? Warn Normanton? No, he could not stomach the incredulous laughter that would follow, no one would believe him. There was nothing for it but to keep his mouth shut. In the morning he would telegraph to Harper. Edward was away, and he could not bother

him. No, that again would not do; Harper could do nothing even if he came. He could set men to watch, of course, and then if nothing happened, he, Jack, would be again laughed at and be supposed to have made a mistake. All he could do was to wait. He did not suppose that he himself was in any immediate danger, the fellow wouldn't dare to touch him in this house. It was afterwards. Well, whatever Edward might do or say, when he left here he would set out systematically to hunt these people down. He knew most of them by sight, which the police did not. In the meantime he could do nothing but wait and watch.

They were a lively party at dinner and Bob Vincent was evidently in his element. He was hail fellow well met with everyone, and yet, it struck Jack, who was particularly observant of him, that he lacked something that the others, though they tried to hide it, possessed. Was it polish? Or that elusive something that was the distinct attribute of a gentleman? Slang prevailed as a method of conversation, and manners left much to be desired, and yet, though Vincent used less slang and appeared to possess better manners, there was something about him that jarred. Perhaps, Jack conceded, wishing to be quite fair, it was the knowledge of what the true man really was that prejudiced him, and that only. He did not argue the point with himself, he just left it.

It was late when Normanton proposed that

they got into their smoking jackets and adjourned to the smoking-room, The ladies, had gone in a body to one of the girls' rooms, there to hold a séance or some such unholy meeting, the girl, Nora Arkwright by name, declaring herself to be a medium.

"We'll leave them to it and hold one of our own," he said. Jack went to his room, changed and took his pipe. He had never stayed at the house before, and, on returning took the wrong passage. Some way down and before he discerned his mistake, he heard a door open and saw Vincent come out. The other stared at him.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

"Downstairs," said Jack. He was not going to make the first move.

"Then you're wrong," replied Vincent. "Got lost or something? Well, follow me." Jack turned, feeling angry that he had been such a fool. Was that Vincent's room then? Now he came to think of it he had seen him come out of a door not far off his own just before dinner. Then the matter passed from his mind. He remembered it later, however.

It was just one o'clock before he was undressed, and then, as he was on the point of getting into bed, there came a faint tap at his door. He crossed the room and opened it: Vincent stood outside, fully dressed.

"May I come in?" he asked quietly.

"Why?" asked Jack.

"I'll tell you," was the reply, "if you'll

open the door. Neither you nor I can afford to make a row here, my good fellow."

"I'm glad you admit that," retorted Jack, standing aside. "Come in if you want to though I fail to see how either of us is going to gain by it."

Robert Vincent crossed over to the fireplace and leaned back, his elbows on the mantelpiece. He looked Jack up and down and grinned.

"You've got a pretty taste in pyjamas," he said.

"If you've come to discuss my night wear, I'm not interested, and you may as well get out," replied the other, slipping on his dressing-gown and lighting a cigarette.

"No, that was only incidental. I've come to discuss far more important things than that. You're a deuced cool hand, Mr. Jack Denham."

"It's my line," he replied, "I make a practice of it. Let's get on with your tale. When you've cleared out I shall have to open the window, and I want to go to bed."

"Don't give me any of your damned cheek!" said the other. "You are hardly in a position for that."

"I fail to see any danger," retorted Jack, dryly. "You would surely not try any killing here for your own sake, I should think."

"I don't go in for killing," was the reply. "I think, perhaps, you may remember that at our last meeting. However, we will let

that go. What I have come to see you for is to do you a good turn."

"You amaze me!" said Jack.

"You realise, of course, what my particular line in Jim Sullivan's business is now?"

"That's why I propose to air the room after your exit," was the reply.

"Just so. You're a fool to take that tone, but no matter. Perhaps you fail to see that in spotting me as you have done, your own position is made several degrees worse than it was?"

"Afraid I don't," retorted Jack, dryly. "You are all, apparently, set on wiping me out of existence as it is. I can't see, therefore, what in God's name you can do more than that."

"I admit we can't do more," was the reply; "but it would necessitate its being done without further bungling. Moreover, it would force me to alter my views on the subject of killing."

"Don't try and tell me that Jim Sullivan holds his hand because of anything *you* may say," said Jack, with a sneer, "for I simply won't believe it, and lies get us nowhere."

"Believe it or not, as you like. As a matter of fact, I am far more useful to Sullivan than any of the others, and he would have to think pretty hard and very often before he started in on doing anything I didn't approve of. Up to now, whether you believe it or not, I've been against all this murder business."

"Ah! I see, humanitarian methods. Very

admirable indeed. Or is it that you find it pays better ? "

" Look here, Mr. Denham, let's cut out any more word-sparring," said Vincent quietly. " I'm here to ask you in a friendly spirit to leave this house to-morrow, and keep your mouth shut about me. I ask you this as a favour."

" Favours between you and me, Mr. Vincent, are a washout," replied Jack.

" In that case, then, I'm afraid I shall have to threaten."

" Threats also leave me cold. They are, in fact, of such an everyday occurrence now, and have become so much a part of my daily existence that I should feel quite lost without them. Life would be so damned dull, that I should be impelled either to take to drink or go off to Mexico. So let's have the threats, only make 'em as short as you can."

" My threats do not concern you this time," was the cold reply, " I leave that to Jim and the others. I should aim, rather, to strike at you through someone else. I happen to know Miss Aileen Edmonton, your brother's fiancée, fairly well."

Jack stared at him for a moment, and then, with an oath, sprang to his feet.

" By God ! Vincent ! Of course ! You are the damned swine who sent that wire to my brother telling him that lie about Aileen's accident ! He told me you were there ; but how should I or anyone connect *you* with such a

thing? You low-down blackguard! Get out of this, or I shan't be able to keep my hands off you."

"Oh, yes, you will, Mr. Denham, I take no chances." Vincent's hand flashed to his pocket, and the next instant Jack was looking down the barrel of an automatic. "Attempt any tricks and you'll drop where you are. There won't be a sound, and I'll arrange things to look like suicide. It won't be difficult to imagine Mr. Jack Denham resorting to that. Now sit down."

The last three words were spoken in short, authoritative tones. Jack's own weapon was out of reach; there was nothing for it but to comply. He sat back on the bed impotently fuming.

"Now," went on Vincent, quietly, "perhaps you'll be reasonable. My threat is not an idle one, and I am going to make it quite clear what I propose to do. Miss Aileen Edmonton and I are quite good friends. It would be simple and easy in these days of anti-chaperonage to arrange a meeting, preferably in London. A little journey in Jim Sullivan's car out to his abode of bliss, and when I had done with Miss Edmonton, she would. . . . . However, I leave the rest to your fertile imagination. Now, how does that strike you as an idea?"

"Hanging is too good for you, Vincent," said Jack, hoarsely. "Get out of this room or *I* must."

"Remember, I don't want to do this," went on Vincent, ignoring the other's remarks. "I only suggest it as an alternative to your holding your tongue about me. Of course, I know you will make it your business to warn the girl, but that won't help her much. There are plenty of ways of getting hold of her, believe me. Now, what do you say? Will you get out of here to-morrow and give me your word to keep your mouth shut about me? Mark this—I trust you. I know very well that you never went back on us in the first place, and the girl Molly knows it too; but one can't expect the others to believe that; they couldn't be straight themselves, and they wouldn't give anyone else the credit. But I know, and I'll trust you. Come, is it a deal?" Jack swallowed hard. Had the threat concerned himself alone the answer would have been easy; but since it was Eddy's girl who would suffer—and he was not such a fool as to doubt the possibilities of Vincent's carrying it through—it was quite another matter.

"I'll—I'll think it over," he said at last.

"Well, that's only fair. I'll see you in the morning after breakfast, and when you have decided what you will do I shall expect you to obey my orders and get out of here to-morrow."

"That," said Jack quietly, "I'll be damned if I do."

"Very well, then it's up to me to make you, and I think you'll regret it, my good fellow.

When I've done with you here you will find that among your friends your word won't go for anything. So if you tried to denounce me to them they simply wouldn't listen to you. You always had a record for wildness. There were one or two adventurous incidents in your life that were never properly explained. Your brother's name, of course, goes, but you are not so well thought of, and you know it to be true too, don't you ? "

Jack was silent. It was certainly true that he had got mixed up with a lot of rather questionable characters a year or so ago, and they had done some wild and foolish things and got talked about, much to his brother's disgust and chagrin. All that was over, of course, but not forgotten, and therein lay the trouble.

" Well, never mind answering," said Vincent, with a grin, " that's your funeral. Now you can get to bed and think over the answer to that other question. If I were you I wouldn't care to have on my conscience the results of a refusal." He went out, closing the door noiselessly behind him.

Jack Denham spent a sleepless night and went down to breakfast looking and feeling fagged out. Captain Normanton and his wife entered the dining-room five minutes after him, and one glance at their faces told him that something serious had happened.

" Hallo ! " exclaimed Harry Brentwood. " What's up ? Backed a wrong 'un, old man ? "

" No," replied Normanton, gravely, " I'm

afraid it's worse than that. In fact it's rather a serious matter, and in any case a very unpleasant thing to have to tell you. The fact is there has been a robbery here." He went on, gravely, " not from outside, but from within the house. All windows are shuttered and barred, all doors locked and bolted, so no one could have got in ; and yet a valuable string of pearls, and a set of opal and diamond ornaments, comprising necklace, ear-rings and brooch, have been taken from one of the drawers in my wife's dressing-table, which was locked before dinner and has been locked until this morning, she possessing the only key which hangs on a chain she wears round her neck."

There was a gasp of astonishment. Jack, realising the full significance of what this meant, glanced at Vincent who had come in a moment before.

" But who could have taken them ? " cried Nora Arkwright, breathlessly.

" That remains to be seen," was the reply. " The theft must have taken place sometime between dinner and when Dorothy went to bed. None of the servants live in this part of the house, and they are all respectable honest folk who have been with us since our marriage. I may say they have all agreed to have their boxes and rooms searched."

" That's what must certainly and most rightly happen to us," said Harry Brentwood, gravely.

"Of course!" cried Nora, and the rest agreed unanimously.

"By all means," said Jack, still with his eyes on Vincent's face.

"You see," put in Mrs. Normanton, in a shaky voice, "it puts you all in such a horrible position, and I hate the idea of a search being made, but. . . . ." She held out her arms appealingly. "What *am* I to do?"

"Do! Why, my blessed child," cried Nora, putting her arms round her friend's neck, "it's the only thing *to do* and we all welcome it. Let's do it systematically, and do it now. You ransack the girls' rooms and Arthur the men's. You haven't called in the police, Arthur, I suppose?" she went on, to Normanton.

"No," he said, "I want to avoid that if possible."

And then Jack took a sudden resolution. Convinced, of course, that Vincent had stolen the jewels, he considered that there might be the faint chance that if he spoke now he might be believed. At any rate he would take the risk on the chance of winning.

"Look here, Normanton," he said, quietly, "if you want to save yourself trouble, and your guests anxiety, unnecessary anxiety, you will begin your search in Mr. Robert Vincent's room."

All eyes were turned upon him in utter astonishment. Harry Brentwood, who thought it was a joke, laughed out, but Normanton frowned him to silence and turned to Jack.

"Pardon me, Denham, I'm afraid I didn't catch what you said. Would you mind repeating it?"

"I suggested," replied Jack, urbanely, "that you saved yourself trouble by searching Mr. Vincent's room first, and I add now, that if you draw blank there, you search his person."

Mrs. Normanton gave a little cry.

"My dear Mr. Denham, are you quite mad?"

"Perfectly sane," he replied. "If you will do as I advise you will be convinced of my sanity." Robert Vincent laughed, a very disagreeable laugh it was.

"I say," he said, "don't you think it would be better if you asked the ladies to go away? It strikes me that there is going to be quite a lot of trouble coming along. We know Mr. Jack Denham's reputation for eccentricity—I think I am kind in putting it that way—but he appears to me to be rather over-stepping the mark."

"You're right, Bob," replied Normanton, gravely. "If you please, ladies. . . ." He opened the door, and reluctantly they went out, amazement depriving them for the moment of the power to protest.

"Now, Denham," said Normanton, sharply, "what's all this? Are you accusing my friend, Bob Vincent, of stealing my wife's jewels, or have you, by any chance, been drinking, and are not responsible for what you are saying?"

"I don't drink," was the reply, "and I *am* accusing Mr. Vincent. I happen to have seen him coming out of your wife's room last night when we went up to get into our smoking-jackets."

"And might I ask what you were doing near my wife's room?" demanded the other. "Your own room is down another passage and nowhere near hers."

"I lost my way," replied Jack. Normanton laughed.

"Not good enough, I'm afraid," he said, dryly. "As a matter of fact Vincent has already informed me of your appearance along that passage and of the natural construction he put on it after our discovery this morning. You don't imagine I should be such a fool as to take your word before his, do you? Bob and I have known each other for a good long time; I met you for the first time last year, but I had heard of you before that." There was a palpable sneer in his voice as he said this.

Harry Brentwood laughed.

"Good Lord, Denham," he said, "what a damned fool you are!" The other guest, Thomas Cobb, went to the door.

"Please excuse me, Normanton," he said, "I'd rather be let off hearing the rest." His friend nodded and the door closed. Jack squared his shoulders.

"Are you going to search Vincent's room?" he demanded. "Do you think I would make

such an accusation if I hadn't something to back it ?"

"I don't care a damn what you think you've got," was the reply. "You *have* made the accusation, and the only thing left for me is to do as you suggest. If you will excuse the impertinence, Bob," he added.

"Carry on, old man, I wish it. But if, by any miraculous chance you should draw blank, I think you owe it to me to repeat the same process with regard to Denham and his room."

"That's all I ask," said Jack.

"Then we'll do it at once," replied Normanton. "Kindly stop here, Harry."

"Right. Call out when you are ready to go over my own belongings."

They went upstairs. Jack Denham and Vincent stood inside the latter's room while Normanton made a thorough and systematic search. Then he passed his hands deftly over his body, and into every pocket. When finally he had done he turned to Jack.

"Are you satisfied ?" he demanded.

"Not in the least," said Jack. "He is cleverer than I thought him, that's all."

Normanton turned on his heel and they proceeded to Jack's apartment and closed the door. Then Normanton turned to him.

"Look here," he said, "I don't know what game you are playing, unless it's meant for a joke—a damned bad joke, by the way—but if so you had better own up. Vincent saw you coming along that passage you know."

Jack was silent. The meaning of all this had dawned on him at last. Vincent was, of course, trying to bring suspicion on him, but to what lengths would he go? Jack decided to stick to his guns.

"I was certainly there by mistake," he said, "but Vincent was there with intention, for I saw him coming out of your wife's room." Normanton regarded him sternly and suddenly frowned.

"Come, man, that won't work. Now own up; if you have been at some of your practical jokes, say so. You know what a reputation you had for that sort of thing. If you have done anything foolish for a joke or a wager, tell me now before we go through your things, there's a good fellow."

"You mean to imply that I have taken the jewels then, do you?" demanded Jack, angrily. "Why, I won't even trouble to deny it. You must be mad! I tell you I saw Vincent——"

"That's enough," broke in Normanton, sharply. He commenced turning out drawers and cupboards. Jack watched him go through his things wondering what would be the end of it. He had failed in his accusation against Vincent; what had Vincent in store for him?

He was not kept long in doubt, for Normanton, having finished with the furniture and clothes, seized upon and opened the dressing bag, and there, wrapped up in some

handkerchiefs, were the missing jewels and with them a skeleton key.

Normanton swore under his breath and looked at Jack who was, for the moment, too shaken to move or speak. There was a painful silence, broken at length by a harsh laugh from Jack.

"Someone besides myself then is given to practical joking," he said, grimly. "Of course, I need hardly tell you I never took the things."

"I see," said the other quietly, "even against this evidence you deny your guilt. Vincent warned me to expect this."

"Of course he did," said Jack, "he put them there."

Normanton laughed.

"I have known him for some time," he said dryly. "I have known you for a year only, and in that year seen precious little of you."

"If you will only think sensibly for a moment," said Jack, "you will see your mistake. What should I, a rich man, want to steal jewellery for? Jewellery that I would find it impossible to get rid of or convert into cash? Just tell me that."

"I don't say you took them for that purpose," said the other. "Possibly it was your idea of a joke, or it was done for a wager and you would, in time, have returned them. But to my mind that is enough. On the face of it such an act is outside the limit, seeing what results from it—suspicion, doubt, anxiety.

No one, I mean no decent man would stand for that even to satisfy a debauched taste in practical joking. It was the act of a man of whom I wish to know nothing more. Furthermore, the way you have tried to fasten the guilt on to Bob Vincent is enough. For your brother's sake I will try to keep your name out of this, and tell the others that the jewels have been found; but I must ask you to leave my house at once. The car will take you to the station."

"Then you won't believe me?" said Jack, suddenly feeling acutely the horrible position he was in. "If I swear to you on my honour——" Normanton stopped him.

"Don't say anything more, let us leave it at that. The car will be round in an hour and my man will pack your things. You had better go to my study and remain there, no one will disturb you. Bob, old fellow, come with me." Then he left him, and Jack realised only too well now the meaning of Vincent's threat last night. At best he had lost good friends in the Normantons. At the worst, the other guests, seeing him depart suddenly would know or guess what had happened. At any rate, it showed how futile it was to try and convince people of Vincent's true nature. The very fact of his having tried to do so had damned him utterly in Normanton's eyes. He went to the small study downstairs and flung himself dejectedly into an arm-chair.

Ten minutes later Robert Vincent came in and stood looking down at him.

"Well, you've made a pretty blithering fool of yourself, haven't you?"

"Curse you, get out of here!" said Jack, angrily.

"I'll go as soon as I've got an answer to the question I put last night," was the reply.

"All right," said Jack, in utter disgust, "I see you are outside the limit and capable of any crime so long as it is vile enough. If I were the only one to lose, I'd tell you to go to hell and do your damnedest. As it is, I can't take the risk of letting Eddy or his girl suffer, so I'll hold my tongue. Now get out unless you prefer to be thrown out."

"Stop a bit, that's not good enough, I want your oath." He crossed over to a bookshelf, looked along the shelves, found what he sought and held a leather bound book out to Jack. "Stand up," he said, "and hold this."

"If you weren't all sorts of a blazing fool as well as the biggest rogue unhanged," observed Jack, contemptuously, "you would know that my word is as good as my bond any old day; but if it makes your neck feel safer and insures you taking your damned and filthy carcase out of here, I'll oblige." He took the Book in his hand.

"Try and keep your temper, my man," said Vincent, "and be good enough to repeat this after me: 'I, Jack Denham, swear on this Bible that I will never inform the police,

my brother, nor any living soul of what I know concerning Robert Vincent, either now or at any other time, so help me, God.' That's settled then," he went on as he returned the Bible to its place on the shelf. "And now I, in my turn, will swear to leave your brother alone and also his fiancée, Miss Edmonton, and further, I undertake to make Jim Sullivan and the others keep their hands off her. I don't imagine for a second that you consider my word of any value, but, strange as it may seem, it's a weakness of mine to stand by it; and, stranger still, the same applies to Jim Sullivan. Well, you'll be going soon. By Jove, Denham, I wouldn't care to be you." And with this parting shot he left him.

Half an hour later Jack Denham left Normanton Hall unnoticed. But had all the guests been gathered round to see him off, and stare their silent disapproval, he could not have felt more sick at heart. The news of his dishonour would get to Eddy's ears one day, and if he kept his oath to Vincent, which of course he would, he could not clear himself. However, life at present was so very uncertain as far as he was concerned, that it was hardly worth while to brood over other possibilities, and with his usual buoyancy, by the time he reached the station he had recovered from his fit of depression and was ready to face anything.

The up train came in. He entered a first class compartment and in another minute they were off. Hearing a shout from the

platform, and running feet, he put his head out, and there, to his surprise and pleasure, he saw his young friend, Geoffrey Chadbrook, running for all he was worth. He opened the carriage door, held out a hand and dragged him in. The breathless boy wrung his hand.

"I wasn't going by train," he gasped, "only I saw the Normanton car and followed. The shuvver told me it was you, so I thought I'd have a jaw before you went. I've got no money, Mr. Denham, what's going to happen?"

"That's all right, old son," said Jack. "If I can't stand you a return ticket, I'd better lie down and die now. I'll send a wire to your people at the next stop. How is it you aren't at school, sonny?"

"Oh, I got ill and am having a month extra," was the reply. "I'm quite well really, you know, only the mater won't let me go back until *she* thinks I am. You know how one's mater always fusses. Not that I mind, though there's not much to do by myself."

A thought suddenly struck Jack Denham.

"Well," he said, handing him his cigarette case, "if you're on the dole just at present, I think I've got a job for you that might be in your line."

"I say, you *are* a sport, Mr. Denham," exclaimed Geoffrey, grinning.

"My name's Jack," said the other, "if you'll so far honour me."

"Right you are. Well, what is it, Jack?"

"I've just been hoofed out of Normanton

Hall," said Jack, grimly. The boy jumped in his seat.

"Good Lord! Why?"

"I can't tell you why; you'll probably get to hear. What I am going to ask you to do is rather a big thing, old son." He paused.

"Get on, Jack, spit it out."

"I want you to believe me when I tell you most solemnly that I am absolutely innocent of what I am accused, and not to believe a word you may hear from those staying at Normanton. I don't mean to infer that they are lying; they are mistaken, that's all."

"I say Jack," said the boy, "I thought you said you were asking a big thing of me."

"So I am, in the face of all the evidence you will hear."

"Well, I call it just a beastly rotten thing to say," was the reply. "If they've turned you out it must be a pretty rotten thing you are supposed to have done, and I know Captain Denham's brother would never do that." He held out his hand, his eyes suddenly brimming with tears, and Jack grasped it.

"Thank you, old man," he said, and then with a laugh: "What an asset in my wild career to have a brother like Eddy! All the same, you're a stout fellow, and I'm jolly proud to know you." There was a pause, and both looked out of the window at the flying landscape. "Do you happen to know Robert Vincent by any chance?" asked Jack presently.

"Yes I do, I think he's a rotter, I never could stick him," was the reply. "My dad can't either, he doesn't like the colour of his ties or socks."

"Oh, doesn't he? Well," said Jack dryly, "I've got one or two little things of the same kind against him too. You say you've got a month more to run loose in?"

"About a fortnight now."

"Well, I wonder if you could find out when this Vincent leaves Normanton and, if he goes to London, follow him?"

"Rather! I should just think I could. It sounds spiffing, sort of Sherlock Holmes stunt you mean?"

"That's it, you get my meaning completely. Only you must not be seen." The boy grinned.

"Trust a Scout," he said.

"I do. Well, I'll leave the details to you. I can't manage it myself or I would. What I want you to do is to find out where he goes when he lands in London. I rather think he'll go out Barnet way, but wherever it is do you think you can follow?"

"Just try me, that's all."

"Very well; when you know, just send a line to my address. You know that all right, and here's a fiver to defray ex's."

"It won't take all that," said Geoffrey.

"That's all right, old son, if there's any over, blow it on yourself. But whatever you do, don't say a word of this to a living soul. Is that understood?"

"You can trust me," said the boy again, and pocketed the notes.

Jack Denham returned to his rooms in Lennox Street and lay low. It was dull but necessary, and he bore it patiently. Three days later he received a letter.

"DEAR JACK,—

Vincent bunked it this morning. I followed. He took the Underground, I after him and got out at Golders Green. There was a big car waiting for him, driven by a very tall clean-shaven blighter, and they were off like the shot out of a gun. I couldn't follow as there wasn't a taxi anywhere, and even if I had taken my bike, I couldn't have kept up with them. I hope this is of any use to you. I haven't heard any talk about you yet, but when I do I'm ready for them."

Jack wrote his profuse thanks. So it was Golder's Green, not Barnet after all, and Harper had been right. Well, this very day he would start in to hunt on his own account. He rang the bell for Jenkins.

"I shall be out all day, Jenkins," he said. "So you can take the day off."

"Very good, sir, thank you."

"If Harper rings up and wants to know where I am, tell your wife to say I'm doing London on the top of a bus."

"Yes, sir. Not up to anything risky are you, sir? The captain told me to be sure and——"

"Jenkins, you can go to the devil," said Jack irritably.

"Very good, sir," replied Jenkins.

CHAPTER V

THE LADY OF THE TELEPHONE

"A MAN called this afternoon to see to the electric light, sir," said Jenkins, as Jack Denham entered his flat in Lennox Street.

"Oh!" said Jack. "Is there anything wrong with the light? I didn't know it."

"I think it was Captain Denham's order, sir, so I understood; he said that extra lights were wanted in your room and the sitting-room, sir."

"Ah! I see. Well it won't do any harm if there are."

"He took the measurements, sir," went on Jenkins, "and left a box containing tubing and tools and will call to-morrow to fix it up."

"All right, Jenkins, toddle off and get me something to eat. I'm dog tired and beastly hungry."

"Very good, sir. I beg your pardon, sir," said Jenkins at the door, "but would it inconvenience you if my wife went out to-night and stayed with her sister? My son, 'Erbert has left his place and is staying with his aunt and the wife would like to see him."

"By all means," replied Jack. "You can see to things all right, my wants are few."

"Thank you, sir, I'm much obliged, sir." The dapper little man, a perfect servant, and invaluable treasure to the two brothers withdrew, closing the door noiselessly after him.

It was a warm night in early October and Jack opened the window and flung himself into an arm-chair. He had spent the entire day in a fruitless search at Golder's Green for any signs of Jim Sullivan and his gang, or any information he could learn concerning them. His little friend, Geoffrey Chadbrook, had told him he had traced Robert Vincent, whom, in his own mind he designated as the "Raffles" of the gang, to Golder's Green and there lost him. So far as Jack had been able to discover, no such person, at least no one of the name of James Sullivan lived there. But then, of course, it was not likely that he would go under his real name. He had discovered many houses that might very well have been the dwelling-place of this gang, one in particular, half a mile into the country struck him as a likely place. It stood alone in its own grounds, fifty yards back from the main road, and appeared to be of an older date than most of the others. But on making inquiry, he learned that it was owned by a Mr. Brandscome of private means, whose wife was a semi-invalid, but who entertained a good deal. He certainly kept a car, but no chauffeur, as his wife's brother, who lived

with him always drove. Jack, tired out, returned home, but made up his mind to go out there on the following evening, and after dark make a more minute examination of the house. In the meantime he was determined not to tell Inspector Harper,, until he was quite certain of his quarry, for he felt sure that the police would probably bungle, and the birds be flown before anything could be done. He knew all the gang, five of them and the two women by sight, and he was far more likely, in his own opinion that is, to make a successful search. He ate his meal, sent over from a restaurant, with a contented mind, and afterwards dozed in an arm-chair. His brother Edward, he calculated was not due back from Kent for another three days, so he would have that time in which to work. He woke with a start as Jenkins came in with decanter and syphon and placed them on the table in the centre of the room.

"Is there anything further to-night, sir?" asked the little man.

"No thanks, Jenkins. I'll turn in myself, soon. Good night."

"Good night, sir, thank you, sir." The door closed. Jenkins retired to his room overhead and silence reigned.

Jack poured himself out a whisky and soda and sipped it in luxurious comfort. Then once more dozed off.

Again he awoke with a start, and glancing at the clock in the corner saw that it was

after twelve. What had awakened him so suddenly? Something he had heard—yes, there it was again, it sounded like water dripping on metal and it came from the middle of the room. He got up and listened. Drip, drip, drip. He glanced at the silver tray on which the decanter stood, and saw—was it red ink? Or——. He looked up suddenly at the ceiling and uttered a cry of horror. A dark red stain was spreading slowly across the whiteness of the plaster, and every half second came the sound of the drip, drip upon the tray as it fell. Blood! There was no doubt about that, and coming from Jenkins' room. He tore out of the room and bounded upstairs, burst open the door of Jenkins' room and ran in. The room was in darkness and he switched on the light. Another cry of horror escaped him and he dropped on his knees beside the huddled body on the floor. Jenkins, good, faithful Jenkins! And quite dead. Strangled, by the marks on his throat and the colour of his face. But the blood, what of that? He peered down and saw that both wrists had been cut and the blood that poured from the severed arteries, evidently before he died, had soaked through the floor and down into the lower room. Now there was no blood flowing, only a still pitiable figure, whom Jack had known almost since he could remember; and for a moment he broke down. Then suddenly rage got the better of his grief, fierce anger against the

cowardly brute who had done this thing. He left the body where it lay, knowing that the police would wish this and springing to his feet turned from the room and ran downstairs.

There was a chance that the murderer was still in the house; he must have come for robbery. There was no sense in murdering Jenkins unless he was wanted out of the way for some purpose. No thought of danger to himself entered Jack's head. His one idea was to get to the telephone and ring up Harper. He dashed into the sitting-room, and just across the threshold of the door stopped.

There was something odd here. He had left the lights full on, now the room was in darkness. He stretched out his hand to turn on the light when he felt it seized and held in a grip of iron and something hard was poked into his chest.

"Cry out or struggle and your number's up," said a high-pitched voice. Alf, the dirty little crook and right-hand man of Jim Sullivan! But murder! Yes, he was capable of that or anything, and Jack felt a genuine fear for the first time in his life.

"Turn on the light," said the voice again. "And remember, I'll plug you if you show fight."

With a hand that suddenly shook Jack complied, and as the room was flooded with light, he felt himself swung aside and the door into the hall shut. Alf stood there. Alf with blood-stains on his coat and Jack

suddenly felt physically sick. Unable to speak, he reached towards the telephone.

"Keep away from that," said Alf, thickly, and all the time his ugly-looking automatic was levelled at Jack's heart.

"Go to the table and pour me out a stiff 'un. I need it. I had to do him in," he went on, as Jack, still unable to speak, did as he bade him. "He would have interfered with my plans which is all cut and dry and according to schedule. Your 'ealth, Mr. Jack Denham, and remember me to the angels when you gits there to-night, for you're going, my hearty, at last."

He swallowed, and drew a deep breath. "That's good stuff, pour me out another of the same sort. I happened to spot you nosing round at Golder's Green this evening that's why I'm here. You've been too clever for once, Mr. Denham. Well, as I said I had to kill your servant. I watched his missus go out with his boy and then I knew there was only you and him here. So I made an easy get in by the ground floor, and your front door wasn't very difficult. I had to let the blood flow to get you up here, you passed me in a corner of the stairs. And so having unburdened myself of these few remarks I think we'll get to work. Go along into your bedroom and do it smart."

Jack turned, and pulled open the communicating swing door. His brother had had a strong swing put on it as he objected to Jack's habit of always having doors open.

"Turn on the light," snapped Alf, and followed him in. The door swung to with a crash behind them and Alf, having turned the key put it in his pocket. Then Jack faced him.

"What are you going to do, you blackguard?" he asked, savagely.

"Never you mind, you'll see presently, just get on to your bed and lie still. If there's any trouble, I shoot."

"If you intend to kill me any way, I might as well be shot," said Jack, whose nerve had suddenly returned.

"Where there's life there's hope, remember that," was the reply. He crossed the room as he spoke, and Jack watched him from the bed. He stooped down and picked up something from behind the dressing-table which stood cornerwise in the room. It was a metal cylinder, and he placed it on the floor.

"That," said he, "was supposed to contain electric fittings. That soft-headed servant of yours took it all in nicely."

"What are you going to do, you swine?" asked Jack again.

"Now, don't you go calling names, young man," remonstrated Alf. "Just you try and behave nice, and go out as a gentleman would like to go out. This little apparatus contains a very special poisonous gas, which, no doubt would have been used in the late war, if it had been invented. Only it wasn't. A friend of Jim's, a German, invented it and sent him over a sample. That sample he wants to

experiment with, and so he told me off to try it on you. If it fails, it fails, and I shall have to waste a bullet. If it don't fail, well, I'm afraid you won't be a very interested party in the experiment. I don't think it's exactly a pleasant process, but it don't take long and it's better than the other way he thought out for you, which might have took weeks. It would depend entirely on your amount of vitality. Now are you ready? Before I unscrew the cork so to speak, I shall turn out the lights."

For a moment Jack had lain there staring at him, paralysed with the horror of it. Better a bullet than this. And yet as the man talked on, he couldn't bring himself to move. Something bade him keep quiet. As the room was once more in darkness and he heard the man's footsteps retiring, he cautiously removed his slippers and put his feet down on to the floor. There was a sudden click and a faint light glowed from the corner of the room, showing for one moment the bent figure of Alf.

"Blast the thing, the battery's run out," Jack heard him mutter, and then came the noise of something being unscrewed. Under cover of this Jack stepped out of bed and crawled upon the floor. He kept his eyes glued to the spot where he had last seen Alf.

Suddenly there came a hiss and in that moment Jack sprang, caught and seized the man's right arm and twisted it backwards. He heard a cry and the revolver dropped at

his feet. Then Alf turned and the two men were locked together and Jack was conscious of a nauseous pungent smell, and felt a sudden constriction of his lungs and throat. Desperation gave him greater strength than he really possessed. It was his life or this man's now, and all the time the gas was pumping out into the room. At last with a supreme effort he swung the little man off his feet and tripped him over backwards. He fell, with his head near the gas cylinder.

"Ah! You've 'urt me, I can't move," he heard as he dropped on his knees by the prostrate figure and began to search his pockets. "Open the door, for Gawd's sake," came the voice again. "I'm going—suffocating——"

"The key, man, where is the key?" shouted Jack, hoarsely, conscious again that his lungs were bursting and his strength going. There was no reply, but he felt a movement and presently heard something fall upon the floor.

"Drag me away—for Gawd's sake," came the voice once more, now only a hoarse whisper. But Jack was on his knees, groping with both hands.

"The key," he groaned. "Oh, God, the key, give me the key." He spoke in his agony as though to a fellow human being. Groping, groping—where was it? It must be here, it had fallen here, he heard it. Ah! Thank God! At last he had it, and then realised that he had lost all sense of direction. A wave of furious, unreasoning anger swept over him.

"What the devil's the good of giving me the key, if I can't find the door?" he shouted, or thought he did. In reality it was only a whisper. Then came Alf's voice once more:

"Oh, my Gawd, I'm dying. Save me, Mr. Denham. For Gawd Almighty's sake, save me, pull me away."

Alf's voice gave him the direction he sought. The words he heard from the agonised little man conveyed no meaning to his brain. He had only one idea, to find the door and open it before the fumes overcame him. He groped his way across the floor, hit against the bed, caught at it for support, for now his head was bursting as well as his lungs, and once more dragged himself along. His breath came in gasps. He heard no further sound from behind until his groping hand touched the door. And then from the far distance as it seemed, he heard what sounded like some animal caught in a trap and fighting to free itself. It was a sickening sound but no concern of his; he had to find the keyhole. Where was it? It couldn't have gone, he held the key so there must be a hole for it to fit in. Oh, for one breath of pure fresh air! He forgot all about the window. That did not exist at all in his clouded brain. Neither did he think to turn up the light. The room was dark, and the air suffocating, therefore he had to get out of the darkness and the stifling atmosphere, and there was only one way to do this, to find the keyhole. Above or below the handle?

Which? Which? Suddenly he banged in futile anger against the door, and then he found it, pressed in the key, turned it and fell with his head against the wooden panels. The sharp pain brought him back to life. With one supreme despairing effort he wrenched open the door and thrust his head out, drew a deep breath and forced his shoulders through, then dragged his body and legs. The door swung violently shut precipitating him upon his face, where he lay. But not for long. He had something else to do. His subconscious brain told him that, and it took him, without any volition of his own, on crawling hands and knees, to the telephone. He groped for the receiver, found it.

"Scotland Yard, quick," he whispered and then repeated it louder three times. He laid his aching, bursting head with the receiver underneath, pressed close to his ear, on to the open desk. He couldn't hold it up any more. Presently came a sound.

"Tell Harper," he said. "Come quick—murder—Denham—Lennox——" The receiver dropped from his grasp and he fell in a crumpled heap on to the floor.

* * * * * * * *

He awoke to find himself in bed, only it wasn't his bedroom but the sitting-room, with old Dr. Watman bending over him.

"That's better," he heard him say. "Now drink this, my boy." Something was held to

his lips, he swallowed and things cleared a bit. He heard a noise and saw someone coming out of his bedroom with a cloth over his mouth and dragging something by the legs. That object, whatever it was, the man let fall with a grunt of disgust, and turned and looked at him.

"Come round, doctor?" he asked, and Jack recognised Harper's voice.

"Yes, but no questions yet. Have you taken the man out?"

"Yes. The place still stinks vilely, but I've opened the windows. It's a bad job about poor Jenkins. I don't know what Captain Denham will say."

"Drink some more of this," said the doctor kindly, once more holding a glass to Jack's lips. "Feel better, do you think?"

"Yes," said Jack, and tried to sit up.

"Lie still, don't move, you can tell us everything lying down. I've written out a wire and will have it sent first thing to your brother. You're quite safe, my boy, Harper's here and a couple of men and he wants to hear what you can tell him."

He motioned the detective across to the bed, and Harper took a chair, sat down and opened his notebook.

Slowly, and with many pauses, Jack told what he knew. Harper helped him with questions, for at times his memory failed.

"And so it's Alf, one of that damned gang," said Harper, as he snapped his book and

pocketed it. "Well, he won't do any more harm, any way. You had a narrow escape, Mr. Denham."

The doctor rose and motioned the detective away.

"That will do for now, you get on with your work. I want my patient to sleep."

"All right, doc., I'm leaving a man at the door as I rather damaged the lock getting in, and I'll get that carcass taken off to the mortuary. We'll keep this out of the papers as far as possible, and if Mr. Denham's too ill to attend the inquest I'll take his written statement instead. We've got poor Jenkins on the bed upstairs and when I've seen to things I'll go round to Mrs. Jenkins' sister, one of my men knows her address, and break the news. Is he pretty bad?"

"He'll be quite fit to-morrow," was the reply. "Only wants to be kept quiet to-day. He could not, I suppose——" here the doctor lowered his voice, "be charged with the murder of this man, Harper?"

The detective laughed.

"Murder!" he repeated. "Justifiable homicide, if they charged him at all, but there'll be nothing of that sort. He was fighting for his life as any man has a right to. That he forgot to drag the little brute out too was the fault of the gas, not his wish or will. Besides he hadn't the strength. It's a wonder to me how he got out himself. Well, I'm off. You're staying here?"

"I'm staying until Captain Denham comes," was the quiet reply.

* * * * * * * *

"Better get up and dress, old man," said Edward, strolling into his brother's room two mornings later. "We shall be going in half an hour."

"Going?" repeated Jack, yawning and rubbing his eyes. "Going where?"

"Into Cornwall," was the reply. "The ambulance came up from the doctor's house last night. It's better for you to be seen going away in that, if there are any watchers. We have thought it all out, and so if any of your friends are on the look out they'll see you carried out on a stretcher and apparently conveyed to hospital or a nursing home. It's a good idea," he added, straightening his tie in the glass.

"I'm damned if I get up and dress for that," retorted Jack angrily. "You must be cracked, Eddy."

"Of course if you prefer to go in your pyjamas that's your affair, but I don't recommend it," said the other quietly. "It strikes me as slovenly in the extreme. Mrs. Jenkins has turned the water on in the bath, so if you want it hot, I advise you to hurry."

It was Edward Denham who had taken command of the situation on his arrival. Edward, calm and collected, but bitterly grieved at the loss of what he termed one of his best friends. It was Edward who had soothed the

broken-hearted wife, placing her in his chair, and with a rare knowledge of human nature letting her cry her fill without attempting to check her tears. It was he who listened, in sympathetic silence to her rambling words and moans of distress and who had finally taken her hand gently in his own and said :

" My loss is almost as great as your own, Mary. In Jenkins I have lost the most faithful servant, the truest friend man ever had. He can never be replaced." It was Edward who took her to her sister and left them words of comfort and more substantial help.

" The funeral, of course, is my affair," he said. " Keep her with you and when she is ready send her back to me. If you want anything, let me know."

The sister foreseeing future difficulties, was suddenly inspired.

" Her son, 'Erbert, wants to go into gentleman's service, sir p'raps you might think of trying him some day."

" A chip of the old block," said Edward. " When he's ready, I'll take him on."

" 'E's got the face of an angel, 'as the captain," was her comment on his departure.

" My old man just worshipped him," sobbed Mrs. Jenkins. " He was his servant all through the war, he was—— " The rest of what she said was unintelligible, even to the sister's ears.

And then Edward ruthlessly made his plans, which culminated in a trunk call to the house

in Cornwall and the arrival of an up-to-date and splendidly equipped ambulance and two burly attendants.

"Look here, Eddy," said Jack. "I haven't told you yet, but I happen to have found out where Sullivan and his gang hang out, and it's my duty now, if it wasn't before, to go and hunt them down."

"I'm glad to hear it," said Edward dryly. "Harper will be here soon and you can hand over your information to him. It's a job for the police, not for you."

"I'm hanged if I hand it over," retorted Jack angrily. "Harper will bungle it. But I'll tell you what I'll do," he went on more quietly. "If you'll scrap this damned fool idea of yours, I'll tell Harper when he comes and go along with him."

"Nothing doing, my son. Get up and dress, or must I call those two men in who are waiting in the hall to help you? I don't advise it. It would be rather humiliating to my mind."

Jack got up and faced his brother.

"Look here," he said. "You have no right to do this and I tell you I won't go. If you want me in that ambulance you'll have to carry me, that's all."

"That's just what I propose to do," was the reply. "At least Musgrave and Barton will do it for you, on a stretcher. Now don't let's have any more trouble," he glanced at his watch. "You've got twenty minutes to

dress in." He left the room and joined Inspector Harper in the sitting-room.

"My brother has just informed me that he knows where Sullivan's gang are living, but refuses to tell you unless I alter my plans."

Harper grinned.

"Don't you worry," he said. "If he likes to keep it to himself let him. We are not idle, I have a sort of an idea that I shall soon put my hands on them. You get him safely out of harm's way and leave it to me. You haven't found out what brought him back from Normanton Hall in such a hurry, have you?"

"Only that there was some unpleasantness with one of the guests. He won't tell us anything," said Edward. "And, of course, I can't insist. He simply says that if I hear anything to his detriment I am not to believe it. Of course I won't. He may be a fool, but he wouldn't lie to me. So I am not worrying. You kept this affair out of the papers nicely, Harper."

"I can't afford to let that damned gang know anything," was the reply. "Let them go on guessing. It was explained fully to the coroner and jury, that is all that was necessary. We have to keep things dark sometimes you know. If anyone is on the watch and sees your brother carted off in an ambulance they'll think their man did some damage, anyhow. It's only when they find Alf fails to turn up that they'll fasten on to the truth and then we'll have to look out. By the way, we identified Alf. He has done a long stretch for

robbery and went by the name of George Amber ; perhaps you remember the case. No ? Well he was an expert at the game. Now I'll go and keep on the watch. If I find anyone following I shall arrest them on suspicion. Good-bye, captain, and good luck. Ring me up if you land safe, and don't be afraid of taking drastic measures with Master Jack, he's as slippery as an eel."

Jack, his face white with anger, entered the sitting-room twenty minutes later and found two strange men, both tall and of immense physique.

" Good morning, sir," said the taller of the two. " I'm Musgrave, and this is Mr. Barton. I hope you're feeling better, sir."

" I'm quite well, thanks. Where's Captain Denham ? "

" He and Dr. Watman have already got into the conveyance, sir. Would you be good enough to lie down on that, sir ? " He pointed as he spoke to a stretcher which lay on the ground.

" What ridiculous nonsense," said Jack, indignantly. " It will do quite as well if I walk."

" I'm afraid not, sir," replied the man, with a grin. " We want to make the delusion complete, as Mr. Maskelyne used to say. If there's anyone on the watch, they must see you carried out. You're pale enough, thank goodness, so we shan't have to use any chalk or grease paint. Lie down if you please, sir."

Jack looked at the two men. They had pleasant faces and the one who had spoken was perfectly polite, but the last words had rung out with a tone of authority. He shrugged his shoulders, realising that he certainly had no chance if it came to a struggle and lay full length on the narrow stretcher. Barton put a pillow under his head.

"Put your arms down to your sides, if you please, sir," said Musgrave, and Jack glared at him, but obeyed.

Then, with a deftness and speed that spoke of long practice, broad straps, attached to each side of the stretcher, and which he had not noticed before, were buckled across his chest, thighs and ankles, and he was helpless.

"Quite comfortable, sir? That's right," said Musgrave pleasantly, and threw a rug over him.

"I didn't say so," snapped Jack, furiously. "You've no right to do this and these straps hurt damnably."

"I don't think so, sir, if you lie still, it's only the novelty of it. You'll soon get used to it, sir. Now, Mr. Barton, up with him."

"Come," he went on affably. "You're not much of a weight, sir, for your height. We'll have to put some more flesh on you when we get down there. It's splendid air in our part of Cornwall, sir, you'll soon be a different man. Mind the door, Mr. Barton. Now close your eyes, if you please, sir, and look as ill as you know how."

"I'd like to twist your neck," growled Jack, glaring at him.

"Not just yet, sir, if you don't mind. Let's wait until we get home and then I am at your service. Ever gone in for boxing, sir? No? Grand exercise. I was reckoned fairly good in my time before I took to nursing lunies. There's a good gym. at the Hall, sir. Now, eyes shut, if you please, we're just going out."

They paused. Musgrave held his end of the stretcher in one hand and put the other over Jack's eyes.

"Better do as you're told, sir," he whispered, bending over him.

Jack closed his eyes and cursed under his breath.

They entered the well-appointed vehicle and he was laid on a couch. Barton went round to the front and sprang into the driver's seat. Musgrave closed the door and sat down on a seat. Jack turned his head and saw Edward and Dr. Watman seated in comfortable chairs talking. The ambulance began to move, but the motion was so smooth, the springs so perfectly adjusted that it was almost impossible to believe they moved at all.

"Eddy," said Jack, sharply. His brother looked round.

"Let me out of this at once. It's a damned outrage."

"No, my dear boy," was the reply. "It's a disagreeable necessity, and I'm afraid you must stop there for a bit. One can't always

have one's own way in life, Jack, and discipline's good for everyone."

Anger deprived Jack of further speech.

They reached their destination in the evening, and Jack, reduced to submission by two hours on the stretcher, was standing at the window, looking out at the vista of fields and trees that flashed by, when his view was blocked by the sudden appearance of a high brick wall. They drew up at a massive gateway. The iron gates swung open and the car passed through. He heard them clang to as they drove on, and frowned as he looked at the twenty foot wall.

They passed down a long drive bordered by fine trees whose leaves, even in the darkening evening, betrayed the tokens of rich autumn tints. It was like passing under an arch of red and gold ; away to his left he saw stretches of lawn, a tennis court, terraces laid out with beds of roses and herbaceous borders, in the distance the glint of a lake—a veritable miniature paradise was this harbour of refuge. Only the high wall with its cut glass imbedded in the top would impede itself before his view. Well, even twenty feet could be scaled, if no one were watching ; and would they watch him ? It was not likely, not with a wall like that.

They drew up before a three-storied, Queen Anne mansion. A broad stone terrace ran the length of the front and steps gave on to the beautifully cut lawns. A peacock strutted

at one end of the terrace, massive stone vases, ablaze with autumn flowers stood at intervals along it.

"By Jove, it's a fine place," said Jack, with honest admiration. Such a place as he had dreamt of where he and the girl of his heart would one day live and have their being. He used to picture himself strolling down the terrace in the moonlight, his arm around the waist of this dream maid, happy in their love, content with all the world, at peace and perfect rest. Here was the place, but alas! it lacked the one essential. He got out and ascended the flight of steps.

"What do you think of my little abode of rest?" asked the doctor kindly, laying a hand on the young man's shoulder.

"Honestly, it's gorgeous," he said frankly, and then with a laugh: "It makes a splendid gaol."

"That rests entirely with you," was the reply. Jack did not answer and the party entered the house.

A matronly woman greeted her master in the large hall. "I got your wire, doctor," she said. "And prepared the rooms you mentioned. Dinner will be ready in ten minutes." She hurried out.

"I think if we just give ourselves a wash and brush up," said the doctor, "that will meet the occasion."

He led the way upstairs. On the first landing he showed Edward Denham his room

and then asked Jack to follow him to the top floor.

"I have put you in the sunniest and most cheerful rooms in the house," he said genially, as he threw open a door and motioned to Jack to pass in.

"Ah, you are there first, Barton," went on the doctor as the sturdy man came towards them.

"Barton will look after you," said the doctor. "He sleeps here, so he will be nice and handy in case you want anything. Your bedroom and sitting-room, if you should want to use one, open out of this room, but have no doors of their own communicating with the passage. Unfortunately these old houses were built so, and I have not set about altering it yet."

"I quite understand," said Jack, grimly. As he spoke he crossed to the window and looked down. A drop of thirty feet was there should he attempt an exodus that way. The only other exit was through this man Barton's room. Yes, he quite understood.

"The gong will ring in ten minutes," added the doctor, then pausing at the door: "There are only two other patients with me at present, a poor fellow who is not quite as other men and a very charming and pretty young widow who is here for her health." He smiled and went out.

Jack glanced at Barton who was pouring hot water into a basin and who then proceeded to arrange the things from his bag, which he had

brought up, on his dressing-table. He was a powerful looking man and had evidently been in the army.

"It's a fine look out from these windows, sir," he said presently. "You can see right out to the sea on a fine day."

"That's certainly an asset," replied Jack, sourly.

The gong rang and he went down to dinner, Barton behind him. At the dining-room door the man left him. It was an uncomfortable meal, and Jack was thankful when it was over, though he admitted that the food was excellent, the wine of the best. He noticed that the two patients mentioned by the doctor were not with them.

"I believe the lady had her dinner early," said Edward, as he and his brother strolled out on to the terrace; "the luny has his meal by himself sometimes. What a glorious night, Jack," he went on, "and what a gorgeous place. I wouldn't mind being here myself, but I shall have to go to-morrow, and I'm afraid I shall not be able to come again for some time in case those fellows take it into their heads to watch me too. I hope you'll be all right here, old fellow."

"Thanks, awfully," was the reply. "But don't you worry about that, *your* mind will be easy, anyway, and that's all that matters."

He strolled away by himself, but he knew that the man, Barton, was not far off and presently he heard his steps on the flags ten yards

behind. Jack turned the corner of the house and came face to face with a woman. She was walking slowly, with her head bent, dressed in pale grey-blue with a filmy scarf thrown over her shoulders, her golden head shining in the moonlight. She looked more like some ghostly visitant than mere flesh and blood. Hearing footsteps she raised her head and their eyes met. Jack started violently. Was she a ghost? Or was it really his dream woman come to life and standing there before him? So had he pictured her often in his dreams, looking at him, her big dark eyes wide with surprise and wonder, her red lips parted, one hand holding the scarf at her throat; the short curly golden hair an aureole round the beautiful face.

He stood awkwardly for a moment regarding her. This, then, was the pretty widow who was here to rest jarred and shaken nerves.

Woman-like, she was the first to break the embarrassing silence.

"I heard there was to be a new patient," she said with a smile, and her tones were unusually deep and rich for a woman. "You have just come?"

"Yes," he said, feeling unaccountably shy, he who feared nothing and no man.

"We must introduce ourselves," she went on. "I am Mrs. Allwood."

"And I, Jack Denham," said he. For a moment her name conveyed nothing to him, and then suddenly the truth flashed upon

him. The lady of the telephone, the widow of the unspeakable Frederick Allwood who had lately died in an inebriates' home. His heart thumped against his ribs.

"You, Jack Denham!" she cried, and suddenly held out her hand. "What *must* you think of me for never having tried to find the brave man who answered my telephone call and was coming to my rescue? Can you ever forgive me?" Their hands met, unconsciously he held hers fast.

"Oh, there's nothing to forgive," he said. "Why should you have bothered? I went because it was due to the other Jack that I should go, but I failed, you see, miserably, and he would not have failed."

"But you answered my call," she said, "and I was a stranger. It was great of you. I used to think chivalry was dead in the world, but I found then it was not. I was going to try and find out who it was but I have been here ever since and Dr. Watman, though he told me your name, would not let me write or read or do anything at first. I had gone through so much, I was, oh! I was ill, you know, and he was so kind to me. He has brought me back to life again."

"I understand," said Jack in a low voice. "Will you believe that I understand and that there is no need for explanation from you?"

She looked up into his face and smiled.

"Yes," she said. "I believe that. I used to wonder what the Jack who answered my

call was like. I pictured him so vividly. Do you know, he was extraordinarily like you ? "

She laughed gaily, her mirth was infectious.

" Isn't it odd," he said, " that we should meet here ? " There were chairs on the terrace and it was a warm night, she sat down and he stood in front of her looking down at her.

" Why are you here, Mr. Denham ? " she asked. " You don't look ill, at least, not very," she amended.

" I'll tell you why," he said, sitting down beside her, " and my story will explain my failure that night."

It took some time in the telling and through it she sat quiet, absorbed. In the end she clasped her hands, terrified.

" How horrible," she said. " Oh, how horrible ! And all this has happened because of me. If it had not been for that call, you would have been spared all this."

" Thank God for that call," he said, earnestly. " Because of that call I have been in danger, because of that danger I have been brought here, against my will, against my inclination, but now—— " He broke off and stared away across the moonlit lawn, " I'm glad I have come, glad that I shall have to stay. I had thought of it as a gilded cage. Now a cage no longer." He stopped and once more stared at her. She rose abruptly.

" Let us go in," she said, and then with a gay little laugh : " We have to retire early here, Mr. Denham, it is one of the rules. You

will have to obey the rules you know." At the window she paused.

"I can't go in just yet," he said. "I want to think."

"The moonlight and this place helps thought," she said. "To-morrow there will be lots to talk about. Good night." Once more he held her hand in his. Then she was gone and he paced the wide terrace. So unlike those other women he had met and grown accustomed to, with their slang and boisterous manners. Rather was she a picture of the old days come to life. come back to tell him that women are not all like those he had met. A picture that was yet no picture, but a living, breathing reality, full of life and feeling, of gratitude for that which he had attempted to do, and had failed in; of sorrow born of years of misery; of hope for the dawning of better years to come. A real woman, and yet the woman of his dreams.

A step behind him broke in on his meditation.

"It is time for you to go in, sir," said Barton, at his elbow. "The nights turn chilly and we close the house at half past nine."

"All right," was the reply, no resentment in it now. "I want to see Dr. Watman."

"He's in the hall, sir."

Jack found the old man alone reading in an arm-chair. He looked up.

"A glorious night, Mr. Denham," he said.

"Grand, doctor," was the reply. "This is a ripping place," he went on, trying to

speak naturally, but knowing all the while that the effort to battle with his pride was making his voice unsteady. "I really think, after all, I shall have quite a good time here, I—er—am quite willing to stay for a time."

"That's right, my boy. I thought you would say so when you saw it. Well, as soon as you feel you would like to give Inspector Harper any information, just tell me."

"I'll give it now," said Jack. "The gang hang out at Golder's Green."

"Yes, that's what Harper told me," was the quiet reply. "The man, Alf, was seen there by a Golder's Green police constable and identified."

"Good God!" said Jack. "The police are brighter than I thought."

"Yes, they are pretty efficient," replied the doctor, dryly. "They don't need much help. By the way," he went on casually, "have you met Mrs. Allwood yet?"

"Yes, oh, yes," said Jack. "Just now, out on the terrace, you know. I say, Dr. Watman, did you know that she was the lady who rang me up on the telephone that night?"

"Oh, yes," was the quiet reply. "I knew all about it, I wanted you to meet some day."

He missed the smile the doctor tried vainly to hide and the twinkle in his kindly eyes. Later when he heard his brother and Dr. Watman laughing together he wondered what the joke was.

CHAPTER VI

A TEST OF LOVE

"ANYONE called, Herbert?" asked Edward Denham, one evening ten days after his return from Cornwall to his rooms in Lennox Street.

"Yes, sir, a man from Scotland Yard, to ask if you were back."

"Oh, was it Harper?"

"No, sir," replied the young man. "He said he was sent round by Inspector Harper, who, he thought, would call you up later on the 'phone."

"What time was this, Jenkins?"

"In the afternoon, sir, about three o'clock."

"Did he say anything else?" asked Denham.

"Only said he was sorry you were not there, sir. He asked if the other Mr. Denham was still away, and I told him, according to your instructions, sir, that he was still in a nursing home."

"Thanks, I'll wait for his call."

It was eight o'clock before it came. He was in the act of turning into his room to dress for dinner when the telephone bell rang.

"Yes," he said, taking up the receiver. "Yes. Edward Denham speaking. Who is it?"

"Scotland Yard," came the reply. "We think we are on the right trail at last, and we want you to help us. Your brother has described them fully, hasn't he?"

"He has," replied Edward. "But how can that help you?"

"You can spot them for us, we aren't quite sure. We've got the place now where they meet," went on the voice. "All we want is for you to give us your help."

"Who is it speaking?" asked Denham. "It's not Harper."

"No. Harper has gone out, it's Inspector Cunningham. He left me in charge while he went off on his trip, you know where to, but it's not safe to mention names."

"It's not," said Denham. "Well, when do you want me, and where?"

"To-night, at nine-thirty, No. 3, Star Street, Soho. We've made it our rendezvous, and then we go in a body to their headquarters. Bring your revolver."

"I will," said Denham. "Anything more?"

"No, don't drive up in a taxi, that's all. Stop at the corner of the street and walk to No. 3. Is it all quite clear?"

"Quite," said Edward.

"Well, that's all then, and thank you very much, nine-thirty, remember."

Edward Denham was not likely to forget. At last, then, the police were on the track of these brutes. Unpleasant as his job was he would gladly put up with it if it were to help

in the arrest of this gang and finish once and for all the threat of death which was Jack's constant menace.

He dined as he was, at an out of way, but excellent little restaurant in the neighbourhood of his rendezvous. He reflected as he ate, how poor old Jack would have liked to be in his place that night, at grips at last with these people who had made him suffer so bitterly, physically and morally. It was certainly rather bad luck that he should be out of it at the crucial moment. But again, just as well. There was the risk that he might have been seen. They would not be on the look out for the elder brother. He finished dinner, felt to see that his weapon was easily get-at-able, and putting on his hat strolled out of the restaurant. He had purposely dawdled over the meal, dragging it out as long as he could, smoking innumerable cigarettes afterwards. It was a quarter past nine now, so that if he strolled leisurely along in the direction he was going (he had ascertained the way to Star Street), he calculated to arrive at the meeting-place at the exact time.

The streets were not crowded, but those pedestrians whom he did see were not over prepossessing in their appearance. The police seemed fairly numerous here. A big car passed rapidly and turned up a street. He glanced up and by the corner lamp saw that it was Star Street. Evidently the police car, so he must hurry. Yes, the big machine was standing

outside a house a good way down. It was not a long street, a few minutes' quick walking would bring him to the house.

There was only one man in the car, a man wearing a blue peaked cap. As Denham came up and paused, the police driver leant forward.

"Captain Denham?" he asked in a whisper.

"Yes," replied Edward.

"Go right in, sir," said the man, "the Inspector's there, you'll find the door open."

Edward Denham walked up the two steps to the door which he pushed quietly open. The passage was in darkness. Away to his right he heard men's voices, talking in low undertones. He advanced a few steps and the door shut behind him.

"All right, sir," said a voice close by. "It's Captain Denham, isn't it?"

"Yes," was the reply.

"Turn to your right," went on the voice. "You'll find the Inspector there, all plain clothes men to-night, sir. Got your gun?"

"I have," said Edward. He turned through a door to his right into a room which was also in darkness, but as he came in, a torch was flashed in his face.

"Right, it's you, sir," said a harsh voice. "I'm Inspector Cunningham. Now we are all here I think we had better start. I'll tell you our plans on the way, sir."

There appeared to be only two men in the room, one at the door and the chauffeur.

"Is this all the force we have?" asked Denham.

"No, sir. Inspector Harper's gone on in front, better hurry, sir. We are timed to get there at ten."

Edward walked quickly down the dark passage and out into the street. The driver of the car put his hand out and opened the door. Edward got in, the three followed.

"All right," said Cunningham. "As fast as you can, man." He sat down beside Edward and they started.

"Do you mind moving nearer to me, Mr. Denham," he said, "and letting one of us be on your other side? He and I both want to be handy with the doors when we get there."

"Certainly." Edward looked at the inspector. He was a very tall man, clean-shaven, with cold blue eyes and big features. His face was somehow familiar. His next sensation was that of a firm grip on both his arms, and a hand in his breast pocket closing on his weapon.

"Quite a neat cop, wasn't it, Captain Denham?" said the harsh voice, and a laugh from the other two followed. "You just walked right into the trap like a mouse after a bit of cheese."

Edward felt his heart give a violent beat and for a moment a deadly fear possessed him. But only for a moment. In a crisis of danger, like his brother, he was at his best.

"It appears then, that you are not quite what I took you for," he said quietly.

"Not exactly; you are very green, Captain Denham," said the big man.

"I don't agree there," he replied. "It was a masterly coup on your part and I heartily congratulate you, Mr.—er—Sullivan, I presume?"

"Yes. I'm Jim Sullivan," said the other. "I think you've heard about me?"

"Quite a lot," replied Edward, dryly. "It's your real name, I suppose?"

"It'll do as well as another. After all, what's in a name?"

"Ah, you study the great bard, I see."

"When I have time," was the reply.

"Between the murders, so to speak," said Edward.

"Keep civil, Captain Denham, it will pay you best," growled the other, giving his arm a twist.

"Don't do that, please, it hurts," said Denham. "Now tell me," he went on, "I am rather interested to know what exactly you want of me, now you have so successfully—er—made your cop, if I may use the vulgar expression."

"You'll know later," was the retort. "What I want to know is, are you going to behave nicely and give us no trouble?"

"My good fellow, what a question. I believe my behaviour is generally known to be quite irreproachable, and as for giving you trouble, I, unlike the usual Englishman, happen to know when I am beaten."

"That's right," replied Sullivan. "Draw the blinds, Mike." Mike, seated opposite, obeyed promptly.

"You are very like your brother, Captain Denham," went on the big man.

"What, in looks do you mean or behaviour? You certainly flatter me if the former."

"You're a pretty cool one, aren't you?" was the retort.

"I never see the necessity for heat at any time," said Edward quietly. "A situation however bad is never improved by fuming or losing one's temper. Don't you find that so in your profession?"

"Never you mind my profession, you leave that alone."

"Certainly," replied Edward, quietly. "But pardon me, Mr. Sullivan, I wish you would loose my arms and allow me to smoke. I should feel much happier if I had a cigarette."

"I'm not hankering after your happiness," growled the other.

"Well, that's an admission anyhow; all the same I am sure Mike over there is hankering for a smoke too, aren't you, Mike?"

"You leave a fellow's Christian name alone," said the man.

"I use it only because I don't know your surname, though of course, it's on the cards that you haven't got one."

With an oath the man leant forward and dealt him a blow on the head with his clenched fist.

"Say that agin and you get another."

"I wouldn't dream of doing such a thing," said Edward, wincing with pain. "Though I'm afraid you have hurt your hand far more than you hurt my head. I hope so, sincerely anyway." As the man raised his arm again Sullivan struck it aside.

"Stow that, you damned fool," he said.

"Thanks, Mr. Sullivan, though I confess your action is a surprise to me. Jack told me of an incident similar to the one just past, with the difference that it concerned ribs and a boot. But the method and the circumstances are the same."

"Don't talk so much," growled the other, "or I'll gag you."

"Which would hardly be pleasant, would it? Thank you for the polite and courteous warning."

The man seated on his left had not spoken and as the car was in darkness he could not tell which of the gang he might be.

He understood now what Jack had meant by Sullivan's voice. It was harsh in the extreme, he would know it again anywhere. But was his knowledge likely to be of any service to him now? He had been fairly and neatly trapped, nor did he see how he could possibly have avoided it. He expected some such call sooner or later. Harper had even hinted at it before he went to Cornwall. What did these devils mean to do with him now they had got him? He was, in a way, now as dangerous to them at large as Jack was, with the difference that he had not taken an active

part against them, nor had any particular desire to do so. He was content to leave that to Harper. But they could not know that; therefore, he had nothing to expect from them but hostility, nothing to hope for and a great deal to fear. He considered that his best plan would be to adopt a conciliatory manner.

"Do you mind if I ask a few questions, Mr. Sullivan?" he said after the silence had lasted for some time.

"I thought I told you to hold your tongue," was the reply, and he cursed himself for having spoken at all. "When you get to your destination you can talk," went on the man, "and then it will be I who will ask the questions and you who will answer them."

After that the silence lasted until the car suddenly rounded a sharp turn. He heard the crunching of gravel under the wheels, and they pulled up.

Quick as thought the door was flung open and the man named Mike sprang out. Denham felt himself being dragged out, and with a man on each side he was hurried up a small flight of steps. The car drove off, a door slammed behind him.

He was in a narrow passage dimly lit by gas. A door at the farther end opened and a plump, respectable looking woman appeared.

"Is that you, Jim?" she said.

"Yes. It's me. All well?"

"All right now," she said. "We've just had the police nosing round, but of course they

had to go away disappointed. They went just in time, or I would have signalled you to turn back."

"Good," said the other. "We'll go straight down now."

"You got him I see," said the woman.

"One of 'em," was the reply.

Edward Denham glanced at the other man who held him. He recognised him by his height and long moustache as the man who went by the name of Appleton. He found himself being pulled now down the passage into the room from whence the woman had appeared. It was just an ordinary apartment such as most modern villas own and lit by electricity. He saw another woman sitting in an arm-chair, but on their entrance she got up quickly and came a step towards them. He noticed that she was extraordinarily pretty in a common, garish way, and that there was a look of intense relief on her face as she saw him standing between the two men.

"Oh!" she cried. "I thought for a minute it was the boy."

"Only his unfortunate brother," replied Denham with a smile.

"If it hadn't been for your cursed folly, we'd have had the two of them before this," snapped the big man, viciously. "Now see the trouble we are put to."

"Nothing worth having is ever obtained without trouble, believe me, Mr. Sullivan," observed Edward quietly.

"Didn't I tell you to stow your gab?" snarled the other.

"Not exactly in those words, but the meaning was the same, I'm sorry I forgot."

"Forget again and you'll know it. Mike, give me a hand, and you Appleton take hold of this fellow's other arm, and if he gives trouble, break it."

"Oh, Jim, how crude you are," cried the pretty girl. "You'll shock Captain Denham."

"Shut up," he snapped. Then he bent and seized the carpet, turning it back a yard.

Denham stood quite still watching them. This then was the secret of the meeting-place, held in a cellar, the entrance of which was extraordinarily neatly covered. For under the carpet was a double floor. The boards of the top were lifted, falling back on concealed hinges and displaying another set of boards underneath.

In these he saw a square cut out, which, on the insertion of a large bladed knife was raised and lifted bodily. Steps rested on the joists, and down these the man, Mike, and the one who had not spoken went.

"Make all secure when we are below," said Sullivan to the plump woman, who nodded in reply. "Now, Appleton, you go first and take him when he gets down, I'll be last."

"Don't you want me?" asked the girl, rather anxiously.

"You! What the——should we want you for?" was the retort. "Stay up there and keep quiet if you can."

"What a devil of a temper you are in, Jim," she said, flushing hotly.

"You leave my temper alone or you'll feel some of it as well as hear it."

Denham looked at the girl. This then, was the woman who had been the means of saving Jack twice. He had no cause to feel enmity towards her. Now he felt a great pity and compassion. He showed it in his face and she, suddenly turning, saw it. The next instant she had shrugged her shoulders and turned away.

"Go on down, you," growled Sullivan giving Denham a push. There was nothing for it but to comply with the order, though he felt instinctively that he was going to his death. He climbed down the ladder, and as his feet touched the ground, he once more felt his arms seized. He looked round. They were in a cellar evidently, the wall of one side of which had been newly bricked up. Possibly the house contained but one good sized cellar, which these ingenious people had divided into two; the entrance to the one being from the back passage through a door and down a normal flight of steps; the entrance to the other, the one through which he had come. Two lamps lighted the place, and at a rough wooden table sat a fourth man, masked and whose voice he had not yet heard.

The trap door closed overhead. Then Sullivan sat down at the top of the table, the two others taking their places on either side of him.

"Now Captain Denham," he said, "I'll be quite frank with you. I've got you here to ask you a question, and I may as well tell you that you don't leave this place alive unless you tell us what we want to know."

"Is that so?" said Edward gravely. "And do I really leave it alive if I *do* tell you what you wish to know? You have shown me so much, you see—this place, the way you get here. The only thing that I can't understand is how you avoid the police on watch spotting you in your car."

"Then you shall be informed," said Sullivan.

"Is it wise, do you think?" asked Appleton.

"Why not, he knows everything, doesn't he? If he wasn't a born fool, he would have spotted our dodge himself. It's simply this," he went on turning again to Denham, "with the driver in police uniform we are merely taken for a police car and can pass without difficulty. There is a back lane to this house. It is quite simple, and we so seldom meet now since the advent of your cursed brother on the scene, that the risk is small."

"Having told me this, am I still to believe that I leave here alive if I answer your questions?" asked Denham, quietly.

"You are, provided that you swear never to betray us."

"And would you trust me, you, who don't trust a living soul?"

"We would trust you. Bob Vincent assures us that your word stands," was the reply.

"Who did you say?" demanded Edward.

"I said Bob Vincent," replied Sullivan. "You know him, I believe, there he is." He pointed to the fourth man seated at the table.

"You infernal fool," retorted Vincent, taking off his mask. "Didn't I make it a bargain that you wouldn't mention my name? I came with you to make up your number, not to be given away."

Sullivan laughed.

"Don't worry," he said, and winked at him.

"So," said Edward, "you are the unutterable blackguard who sent that wire to me, are you? There was such loathing and contempt in his tone that even Vincent winced. "I never liked you, but I never dreamt you were as vile as this. Mr. Sullivan," he turned to the leader, "I would not stoop to beg a favour of you, God knows, but I do ask that out of decency you tell this man to go, he is not necessary to this conference, and however bad you others may be, at least you don't stoop as low as he does."

"How do you mean?" demanded Sullivan, frowning.

"His job, I take it," replied Edward, gravely, "is to make the robberies committed at his friends' houses easy."

Vincent got up with a laugh.

"Don't worry, Jim," he said. "I'll go without being asked. What you do now is no concern of mine, I've done my part and now I'm off home. So long. Let me know if and

when you succeed. I'm going into the country in a few days and will send you my address." He turned and went.

"And now," said Edward, "go on with the questions. I'll do my best for you, I can't say fairer."

"All right. It's only one question I want answered," said Sullivan. "Tell me exactly what you have done with your brother?"

He was not surprised at the question, he had expected it and was prepared with his answer.

"He is in a nursing home."

"That's a damned lie," said the other.

"And that's not polite, Mr. Sullivan," retorted Denham.

"Answer my question. I *know* he is not in any nursing home. It was all a damned plant that ambulance and stretcher game. I sent one of my men to find out."

"Oh, yes, I suppose so," said the other. "Nevertheless, I assure you on my word of honour as a gentleman that it is true."

Sullivan rapped on the table.

"Look here," he said sharply. "You are not here to tell me any of your lies, and if you persist in your present attitude I'll give you something that will make you alter your tone. You have smuggled your brother off somewhere, and I insist on your telling me where he is. Do you hear?"

"I hear, Mr. Sullivan," replied Edward quietly. "And I have told you the truth, more than that I will not say."

Sullivan sprang to his feet.

"If you don't tell me of your own accord, I'll have it thrashed out of you," he said. Denham was silent, he knew that what this man threatened he would do.

"Your man lied palpably when he said he had gone to a nursing home. He is not good at lying, though he ought to be, being your servant." A retort rose to Denham's lips, but he swallowed it down.

"Obviously then, you have sent your brother somewhere out of our way. He certainly would not have gone of his own free will, he is far too big a fool. He is bent on getting his own back on us, and nothing short of shutting him up somewhere would stop him. He has killed two of my men already. You know this just as well as I do; that being the case, just hand over what you know about it."

"It's the last thing I should dream of doing," said Denham quietly. "And as for his killing your men, the Frenchman fired first and missed; the other, known as Alf died from gas poisoning, intended for my brother."

"Didn't I tell you?" demanded Appleton. "Didn't I tell you he would say that? All this trouble for nothing."

"Shut your trap, man, and don't make yourself a bigger fool than you look. Captain Denham will answer my question, if not now, then later. I suppose you quite realise the position you are in here?" he went on, turning to his victim.

" Nothing could be clearer," was the reply.

" Not quite clear enough, evidently, otherwise you would answer my question."

" You make a big mistake when you say that," said the other quietly. " Whatever you may threaten to do to me you will never alter my determination. If you knew where my brother was, you would get at him and eventually kill him. Therefore from my lips you will never know. Get this into your head now and for always, it is fairer to you to know it, though I don't consider that as a good reason, but at any rate it will save time and unnecessary talk."

" Is that your last word ? "

" Absolutely my last word."

" Very well, then, I will tell you what mine is. Until you make up your mind to give the information I want, neither food nor drink will you have ; you will be kept down here, where no one will find you. If you shout you will not be heard. Morning and evening one of us will come for your answer. Until you give it you know what to expect."

" I have given it," said Denham quietly.

" Wait till the pangs of thirst and hunger come," was the reply. " You'll find the cement hard for a bed, and it's a bit damp and chilly down here, but I daresay you won't mind, for a bit," he added significantly.

" Come on you fellows, we'll be going. It's about time we went to bed." Then turning to Denham, " I shall ring up your servants and

give a message to say you have had a slight accident and are staying with a friend for a few days, you see it wouldn't do for inquiries to be made."

"Look here, Jim," said Appleton, suddenly pausing. "Why not buckle him into that nice little contraption you got fixed for his brother? He'll give in all the sooner and we shall gain time." He pointed to the wall opposite the trap-door as he spoke, and Edward turned and looked in that direction. He saw something dangling from the wall, but could not distinguish what it was. Jim Sullivan looked at the tall soldierly figure and rubbed his chin.

"No," he said. "That will do later, if he holds out, but I'll just let you see it, captain, and I'll explain what happens, the knowledge may oil your tongue." He took Edward by the arm and led him to the other side of the room.

"You see these two chains, about six feet apart? Well, when we get your brother, these leather wristlets go round his wrists. He is then forced by this collar to stand on tiptoe; you realise the strain that means, if he tries to stand on his feet this broad collar in the centre will choke him."

"I see," said Edward. "Thank God, if I can help it, he'll never have to go through it."

"Don't you be so sure of that," went on the other. "Then you see that broad strap just below, that goes round his ribs, and if buckled to cracking point, will hurt some, I imagine.

Same with the other which goes round his waist. Every breath he draws will be a little hell of its own. I invented all this myself, thought it out when I couldn't sleep one night, and what's more, I've tried it myself. I stood it for a quarter of an hour and then fainted. How does it strike you ? "

"I congratulate your ingenuity, Mr. Sullivan," replied Edward quietly. "And if I may give you my candid opinion, I consider that while you are alive the world is not a fit place to live in."

Jim Sullivan laughed.

"Well, think it over, if you haven't given in after three days, you'll get that. Good night, captain, I wish you pleasant dreams."

One by one they climbed the ladder and disappeared. At last Edward Denham was alone. They had left the lamps there, turning one out. So he lowered the other, husbanding the oil and wick for as long as he could. He wondered how long it took to starve to death. He remembered that those Irish prisoners took ages over it, but then they had water, and he understood that anyone could live on water for quite a considerable time. Without it death would be very quick, well, better his death than Jack's. The younger brother had been his mother's favourite, and he had promised at her death to care for him and help him in everything. He would do it now. It would be terrible for Aileen, but time would heal everything. Well, it was hard to die like a rat

in a trap, but there was nothing else for it. He had matches and a few cigarettes left. He would smoke one now and turn down the lamp, leaving only a glimmer, then he would try and get to sleep.

Tired out, in spite of his position with its utter horror and hopelessness, he slept soundly and was awakened by the trap-door opening and a voice speaking.

"Changed your mind yet?"

"No," he said.

The trap-door slammed down. Three times the question was repeated, the same question, the same answer. That meant, reflected the thirst-tormented man that it was the evening of the second day. Twenty-four hours only. But he wanted only water, water and warmth. Food he could do without for a bit, but to-morrow—what would it be like to-morrow? Poor old Jack, would he have done the same for him? Why, of course, he must be going mad for such a question to have entered his mind. Mad! Yes, probably that would be the end of it. All things he had read of connected with starvation, in historical tragedies, came surging to his recollection. The boy, who was he? He couldn't remember his name now, but he was a prince or a duke, imprisoned in Scotland, and starved to death. He had gnawed his own hand before he died. Would he be reduced to that? No, he thought not. He lay down on the hard floor once more, sleep was what he wanted, but sleep wouldn't come;

instead, that craving for water and warmth. At last he dozed and dreamt that he heard a sound, a most insistent sound it was and very close to him. Surely it was a voice, and yet there could be no voice down here, they had come with that question hours ago, and had their answer. Now he was alone until the morning. No, there it was again. Wide awake he sat up.

"Mr. Denham! Oh, for God's sake answer, Mr. Denham!" It was a woman's voice, low down near the floor.

"Yes," he said, hoarsely. "Yes, what is it? Who are you?"

"I'm Molly, you know, your brother's friend," answered the voice. "Can you hear?"

"Yes, yes," he said. "But I don't understand, Jack's friend?"

"Oh, never mind that, I couldn't come before, they made it impossible. I loosened a brick one day in the new wall, because I wanted to hear what they talked about down here. They are all out, and I'm alone for a time."

"I see," said Denham. "Could you, do you think, give me some water, I'm parched."

"The hole is not big enough," she said. "But I've got a basin of water and a sponge, I'll soak it and push it through. There! Can you feel it?"

Denham grasped the piece of soaking sponge, drew it out and sucked desperately.

"More," he said, "and thank you, thank you, Molly." He heard a sob choked back.

" It's to help you not to tell. Oh, Mr. Denham, you mustn't tell. They'd kill him and you too, and—I couldn't—I couldn't—." The voice broke in another sob.

" Can you help me get a message through ? " he asked then, anxiously, desperately.

" Not to the police, I can't give my friends away, but, listen, can you hear ? "

" Yes, yes."

" If you will tell me where the boy is, your brother, I'll 'phone to him and get him to come and help you. I can't by myself, I'm not strong enough, I can't lift the trap-door, but together we could do it. Will you tell me where he is ? "

Denham ground his teeth and suppressed an oath.

" Another trap," he said. " Yes, if I tell you, then they will know, won't they ? You can't fool me like that, woman."

" Oh, you are mad ! " she cried. " Didn't I tell you I gave you water to help you hold out against them. In another day or two you will be telling them anything they ask and you won't be able to help yourself. Do you think I don't know ? You're a fool, you are as bad as your brother, who knows nothing about women. I tell you I want to save him ; if one of you must go, then it must be you. Does that satisfy you ? If it doesn't, I'll poison you before you can be tortured into telling."

The voice was impassioned, agonised, truth rang loud to his ears. She must mean it,

oh, yes, no woman could speak in such a tone and not mean every word she said.

It was Jack she wanted to save, not him; he was to be fed only so that he would have the strength not to give away Jack, but if Jack could come and save him, this woman was willing to help. Only there must be no risk for Jack.

"If my brother comes," he said, "he will bring the police too."

"He won't if I tell him not to," she replied. "But don't waste time on fool arguments, Mr. Denham. If I am to 'phone him, I haven't long to do it in, they may be here at any time now. Will you tell me?"

"Yes," he said. "I'll trust you, girl, I have to. It's a trunk call and may take time. He's in Cornwall at Dr. Watman's house, Treloar Hall, Treloar. I don't remember the number. In return for what you do, if he comes and I can get away, I will promise not to give away what I know. That is only fair to you."

"You're a white man, Mr. Denham," said the girl. "You are more like your brother than I thought. I'll go now, I don't have anything to do with prayers and that sort myself, but if you believe in it, then get going on to whoever you think will hear you and ask that they don't catch me at the 'phone."

After that, silence, and Edward Denham, on his knees now, buried his face in his hands.

In the room above a voice was calling.

"Trunk, yes. Treloar 103, and hurry, for the Lord's sake hurry. Oh, I know, of course you do, but get on with it, there's a dear."

Up and down the room she paced, pausing with beating heart at every sound outside. Once more to the door, back again to the window. Ah! a car stopped at the gate. No, it was going on again. Oh! how she would like to kill that driver who had caused her that moment's agony. How long would they be, her friends, and the call, would they both come together? Things generally happened like that in this blinking upside down old world. They always went wrong, when it would be so easy, just as easy in fact, to go right. Jim was taking his friends back to their houses, he would return alone, but he was all that mattered, she could gull the rest of the crowd, not Jim. No one had ever taken him in; the only time she had done so was when she wired to the boy Jack's brother to meet him at Victoria Station, and for suspecting that she had helped he had, oh, well, never mind what he had done. It was over, but he hadn't seemed to trust her after that, not as he used to. Oh! damn Exchange, why didn't they hurry? In America they did things better, she knew that for she had been there; nowhere on earth was the telephone system so bad as in England. Then she laughed. On earth! Did they have it in heaven, or in hell? She hoped not, if she was to go to one place or the other. She hated

telephone calls, it always meant some worry or trouble——

Ah! there was the bell, good girl, bless her, she had put her through quickly.

"Yes, yes, who is it? Barton? No, I don't want you, I want Mr. Denham, quick, please, say its urgent. What? No, no, you damn fool, I can't hear. What, neither can you? Well, I'm thankful for that, I didn't mean it. Now, slowly, I—want—Mr. Denham. Do you hear all right? He's out? Fetch him in then, quick, tell him a lady wants him, urgent, desperately urgent. All right, I'll hold on, don't you worry."

Oh would he never come. Wasn't it a car! Yes, of course it was. No, it was going on again. Oh, boy, boy why don't you come? Yes, this time it was a car and turning in at the gate.

"Yes, yes, it's me, Molly. Can you hear? Your brother is trapped and being starved to death unless he tells my pals where you are. Oh! yes of course it's true, but listen, Jim's coming back and will catch me. Will you come? Swear you will not bring the police, I will help you, look out for you. No, curse your fool head, it's not a trap, it's to save you both. Soon he'll not be able to hold out and will give you away. Quick, quick he's coming, swear you won't tell. All right, boy, and then go to Lennox Street and wait until I ring you up to say I am alone, then come. You'll come? Yes, boy. It's the house with the yellow

gates at Golder's Green, Mr. Brandscome's house."

The door opened, the receiver rang home, the girl stood facing him as he entered.

"Oh, thank God, thank God!" she cried.

"Why, girlie, what's the matter?"

"I thought that something had happened to you, you were so long. But it's all right, and oh, I'm so happy."

She flung herself into Jim Sullivan's arms and burst out crying.

"Lord Almighty be good to us!" he exclaimed, patting her head. "Was there ever such a queer thing invented as a woman. What's up, old girl?"

"Nothing, only I'm so thankful now that I know it's all right."

And, so that he could not see her face, she kept it buried on his shoulder.

CHAPTER VII

METHOD IN HIS MADNESS

JACK DENHAM lay in bed with the autumn sun pouring in through the windows. He was reflecting on the queer happenings during these last few months that had ultimately ended in his being shut up in a private nursing home in Cornwall. And the strangest part of all was finding the woman who had been the innocent cause of all his troubles here as well. He had often wondered what she was like ; in some queer way he had pictured her as resembling that dream-woman of his who so constantly haunted his sleeping hours, and, stranger still, he had found that dream come true. For she was beautiful, adorable, as only his dream-woman could have been. So had he pictured the woman he would one day marry. In such a place as this with its glorious old house and wonderful gardens, had he visualised their meeting-place. And now he was here and she was here, and the place was no longer a prison but a wonderful enchanted world. And he no longer chafed at the twenty foot walls that surrounded them, or that the gates were locked, or that two

sturdy attendants were there to see that he did not get away. He revelled in it and in the fact that it was as impossible for him to get out as it would be for any of the Sullivan gang of criminals to get in. Before this, his one aim and object in life had been to come to grips with them, now he only wanted them to leave him alone with his dream-woman.

It was eight o'clock, and breakfast was at nine. He sprang out of bed and into the bath-room leading from his luxurious apartment. When half dressed there came a knock at his door, and Barton, the attendant who had been appointed to look after him, came in.

"You are up early, sir," he said in surprise.

"When a day like this calls how can anyone lie in bed?" replied Jack, gaily. "I suppose there are no rules here as to when one may go out, are there?"

"None at all, sir, you please yourself. You will find Mr. Smithson outside, I expect."

"Who's that?" asked Jack.

"The other gentleman who is staying here, sir," was the reply.

"Oh, I forgot there was another so-called luny shut up here," said Jack with a laugh. "He's harmless, I suppose?"

"Quite, sir. Has queer ideas on some things, and he's here because his relations prefer to pay a stiff price to be rid of the trouble of looking after him themselves."

"In which case I gather he is well rid of them," said Jack.

"That's my own opinion, exactly, sir," replied the man. "Shall you be playing tennis to-day, sir? If so, I'll put out your things."

"It depends," was the reply.

"I understand that Mrs. Allwood plays very well indeed, sir," said Barton, casually.

"Oh, well, in that case, put 'em out," said Jack, flushing, and walking hastily to the door.

There was no exit into the passage from his own two rooms save through the one in which Barton slept. This, when he first came, had galled him exceedingly, but now it was different. Now circumstances had changed. No longer did he want to chase after the gang, they could go to perdition as far as he was concerned. There was no longer any need to watch him and prevent a possible attempt at escape; he reflected with a grin, on his way downstairs (they had put him at the top of the house for safety)—that if instead of wanting to keep him they had wanted him to go, they would have to turn him out.

It was on the wide stone terrace which ran the whole length of the house that he came upon Mr. Smithson. He was of medium height and appeared to be a few years older than Jack, with clean shaven, humorous face, but not a trace, as far as Jack could see, of mental deficiency in the expression. He paused in his rapid walk and regarded the new-comer with a genial smile.

"Ah! so you've come," he said, as Jack approached. "Old Watman rang up Susie,

to say he was bringing another luny along. You know Susie, by the way, don't you ? "

" I don't know Susie," replied Jack. " And I may say also that I am not a luny."

" Then what the deuce are you doing here ? " demanded the other. " No one but a luny would allow himself to be taken to a God-forsaken hole like this. I'm one, you know," he added confidentially. " At least they all think so, and so, for the sake of peace and quiet I just humour them. As a matter of fact Denham—that's your name, ain't it ? I thought so. As a matter of fact, old bird, I've actually got better brain fittings than any of the blighters here, only I keep it as dark as I can. You won't give me away, will you ? You look a sport ! "

" Of course I won't," said Jack, grinning, and walking along the terrace at a rapid pace in order to keep up with the other. " But, tell me about Susie, I haven't met her, who is she ? "

" She is the buxom old soul who looks after the linen and one's garments, and keeps the other servants in order. She's all right if you don't scratch her fur up the wrong way, but if you do, look out for squalls. Old Watman swears by her, but then you know, quite between ourselves, old Watman isn't quite—quite—— " he touched his forehead and winked at Jack. " Poor fellow, it's very sad, because of course he means well, but if one humours him one can rub along all right without undue

friction. He and Susie should go well in double harness, but not here, mark you. They are really neither of them capable of running a big establishment like this."

"It appears to me to be very efficiently run indeed," said Jack.

"Not really, it's only the surface you see," was the reply. "You wait until you have been here a couple of years as I have, you'll see then the true state of the case without the veneer. Take Barton's face, for instance. Have you noticed it?"

"Lord, no!" said Jack, laughing. "What's wrong with it?"

"It's all wrong, my dear chap," replied the other. "I can't imagine how you missed seeing it, I spotted it the first day I was here, and I simply put my foot down and refused to have him near me. One takes these dislikes, you know—do you find that so?"

"By Jove, yes!" said Jack. "I should think one does. The world would be a pretty dull place if one liked everyone one met in it."

"That's what I say," was the reply. "And old Potman is such a damn fool he can't see it."

"Who's Potman?" asked Jack, feeling a bit staggered by now.

"Oh, did I say Potman? Stupid of me—I meant Watman, of course. I get muddled with names sometimes. My memory is not all that it should be. However, what was I talking about?"

"Barton's face," suggested Jack.

" Of course ; poor fellow, I often sympathise with him and ask him what it feels like really to have a face like his. He says he tries to put up with it, but feels that one day it will be the death of him. Well, there it is ! One can't have everything. I lack your inches, but my brains make up for it. Tall people, you know, are never as clever as shorter folk—"

" Is that so ? " inquired Jack. " I say, do you mind going a bit slower, I'm getting out of breath."

" You're not in training, Denham," was the reply, as the pace slackened. " Now Musgrave, that's my servant here, you know—he was a prize-fighter. Well, he keeps me as fit as a fiddle. He's a splendid chap. We go for miles and miles all round the country."

" Oh, so you do go beyond the boundary wall ? " asked Jack.

" Lord, yes ! We often go down to the sea, about seven miles from here, and have a swim. And then Mrs.—Mrs.—I can't remember her name, but the lady who stays here, you know—she takes me for runs in her car. She's a topping driver."

" Oh, she's got a car, has she ? " Jack wondered if he and she would soon be going for wonderful drives round the country, too.

" Yes, and that old blighter, Botman, makes use of it, you know," said the other. " He hasn't got one himself and whenever he wants to go anywhere, or send for anything, he just takes hers ; which makes me wonder sometimes

if he hasn't got more brains than I give him credit for, because you see, Denham, the proof of brain power is in the aptness with which you can make the best use of other people and their belongings. Do you get me ? "

" I do," said Jack. " It's certainly one form of brain power. But, thank God there are others."

" Not really, old man. One thinks so, but everything leads to the same goal in the end—the best possible use of everything and everybody for oneself. That's all life amounts to really. The rest is humbug and hypocrisy, and leaves me cold. Come and let's stuff eggs and bacon into ourselves. Watman hates unpunctuality, and of course one tries to do everything one can to please the dear old fellow. He's got the kindest heart in the world. I don't really think he would take advantage of a flea—if he ever had the chance, that is. Personally, I never can get hold of them."

Jack's brain reeled, but he said nothing, and the two turned back and entered the house. Doctor Watman was in the dining-room, and greeted the two young men genially.

" Help yourself, Denham, you'll find everything you want on the sideboard. How are you, Peter ? Been for your usual walk ? "

" Yes, doc. The pace wasn't quite so strenuous though, as our long-legged friend there gave out in the breathing department. Supplies ran short, you see. I'll lend him

Musgrave to put him in training. Long legs are very well in their way, but they are not of much use here."

"That's true," said Jack, grinning. "Do you play tennis, Smithson?"

"Don't call me that," said the other, sitting down with a huge plate of eggs and bacon before him. "Call me Peter. Smithson's an offence, it's no good to anyone, and as bad to have tacked on to one, as Barton must find his face. Yes, I play tennis, but can't always remember if it's golf or croquet, which has its disadvantages sometimes. However, if you don't mind putting up with that little trifling inconvenience, we might have a go in after breakfast."

"Mrs. Allwood plays well," put in the old doctor. "I think a quiet game would not hurt her in the least. She has had to take it very quietly, you see," he went on. "After that terrible night three months ago, when her brute of a husband attacked her, her nerves collapsed entirely. I had known her mother, and in fact attended her at Elise's birth, and of course, I took the poor girl down here at once and did what I could for her. Her husband died in an inebriates' home some time ago. She refuses to wear mourning, which I think quite right, and fortunately she is well off, her mother's money having been settled on her. She often spoke about you, Denham, without knowing who you were, and the way you answered her cry for help. She wondered

if anyone else would have gone to the rescue of a strange woman as you did."

"Anyone would have gone," said Jack, flushing.

"No!" said a low voice in the doorway. "Not anyone—or everyone." Elise Allwood came in, smiling. "I thought I would come down to breakfast, doctor," she said, "on such a glorious day as this."

The three men rose. The doctor drew up a chair, Peter Smithson hurried to the sideboard.

"I am the commissariat department," he said. "What will you have, Elise—one hen seed and one bacon, or two of both?"

"One of each, Peter," she said, then turning to Jack, "We call each other by our Christian names here," she said. "It is easier for him to remember."

"Oh, don't mind me if you want to discuss my infirmities," said Peter, as he brought the plate back and placed it before her. "The doc. there, will tell you exactly what's wrong in a few big words which you won't understand, and will therefore be just as wise as I am. Are we going for our spin this morning," he went on to Mrs. Allwood—"or is the new blighter going to have a turn?"

Doctor Watman coughed. "I think I should prefer it, Mr. Denham, if you did not go," he said. "Your brother was most anxious that you should not be seen by anyone, and under the circumstances, perhaps——"

"That's his polite way of telling you, you won't be allowed to go," said Peter, nudging the other. "It's very nice of him to wrap it up like that, but of course one sees through the camouflage at once."

Jack laughed.

"I don't think any of us will go," said Mrs. Allwood. "I would far rather stay here quietly, and perhaps you would care for a game of tennis, Mr. Denham."

"I understood that Christian names only were used in this particular mad house," said Peter—"or is it only to humour me?"

"Of course not, you silly owl," said Jack, noting the touch of pathos in the other's voice and quick to answer to the call. "I am Jack, and the lady is Elise—what a charming name, by the way."

"Yes, suits her, don't it? Shall I come and pick up the balls for you?" asked Peter.

"Better go for your walk, hadn't you?" suggested the doctor.

"Oh, I see, want to get rid of me, on the principle that two's company, and three's an army corps. All right, I'll trot."

Elise glanced appealingly at Jack.

"No," he said, responding at once to her unspoken wish. "I'm afraid you can't go for your walk to-day either, Peter. We want you to help, so don't be a selfish beggar for once, but stop with us, will you?"

Whatever disappointment he may have felt at the spoiling of his tête-à-tête, it was quickly

made up for by the look of intense pleasure that lit up the other's face.

"Thanks, Denham," said the old doctor.

"His people never come to see him," said Elise to Jack, as later on, they strolled down to the tennis court. "They don't care what happens to him, I believe. Fortunately he is in good hands, but it would be the same thing if he were not. Sometimes my blood boils when I think of it. For he is the dearest boy in the world."

"Nicer than Jack?" asked her companion.

"Jack? What Jack?" she asked.

"Oh, the fellow you wanted to ring up that night, and got on to me instead."

"Oh!" she laughed. "Of course, I had forgotten. Yes, he is just as nice as Jack."

"I hate that fellow," said Denham, savagely.

"No, don't do that, he is very dear to me," was the reply.

"Why did you call to him that night?" demanded Jack, sternly.

"Why? Oh, because he was the only one who knew, and would have come. I didn't know there was another Jack."

"But you know now," said he.

"It is being forced upon my notice," said she, smiling. "Come, let us play."

For an hour they played, and half way through Peter Smithson left them and strolled off, and presently they saw him in the company of a powerfully built man, walking swiftly down the avenue.

"What a good soul," said she, apropos of nothing.

"He has more wits than lots of saner people I know," replied Jack. "You are tired, so let's go and sit in the sun on the terrace, where we met for the first time last night. I want to talk—there is such a lot to say, and I feel that if you and I stayed here for the rest of our lives, we should never get through it all."

Ten days passed—days that were like a wonderful idyll to Jack. Never had he known such complete happiness as he found in the company of this woman. They were twin souls, made for each other. Here, at last, in this old world garden, shut away from the rest of the world and its worries and sorrows and sordid trials, he had at length found perfect happiness.

"You've just got to marry me," he said, as together they strolled among the shrubs down by the lake, a favourite spot.

"I'm a year older than you, dear," said she. "And that means ten in a woman."

"Rubbish," said he. "That's sheer piffle, you know. Where love is, neither age nor anything else in the whole world matters."

"Does it not, Jack?" said she. "But is love really there?"

"You know it is," he replied. "Unless for you there is someone else."

"I never said there was anyone else, did I?" she said, holding him off when he would have caught her to him.

"There is that other—Jack," said he, gloomily.

She broke into a peal of laughter. "My dear," she said, "he is my brother."

Then she was in his arms, and for a time all else was forgotten.

"Poor Peter," said she, at last.

"Why Peter?" he asked.

"He's very fond of me," said she. "But he knows about you, Jack, and, mad though he is called, he has the greatest sanity of all—the power to rejoice in other people's happiness. That is why he has always left us together. He likes you, Jack, and he loves me, I think, and he would do anything for both of us. His poor crippled mind will rejoice in our happiness. There is no place for jealousy there, you see."

"Poor fellow," said Jack. "Was he always so?"

"I believe not. Some great sorrow brought him to this. The doctor knows, but of course it is his secret. I believe Peter was once a well-known member of society. The war, and this grief of his, produced the result we see. I wonder where he is. I want him to be the first to wish me joy."

"I saw him going out with Musgrave," said Jack. "I think I hear the gates now. No—by Jove!" he added. "It's a car. I thought no one was allowed in here."

As he spoke, they both turned towards the drive along which a large open car containing three people was coming.

"It's Peter and Musgrave," said Elise. "But I don't know the man who is driving. Let's hurry on."

They gained the terrace by a short cut, just as the car drove up. They turned the corner in time to hear the doctor, who had come to the door, call out:

"Hallo, Peter! What's this? Found a friend, eh?"

"Yes," said the other, eagerly. "A fellow I used to know—before—well, before I came here."

The new-comer, slight, tall, smiling and debonair, was half way up the steps. Then Elise felt her hand clutched and she winced with the pain.

"What is it, dear? Someone you know?"

"It's Robert Vincent," he said, between set teeth. "The man I saw in Staveley Road, a member of that gang. The man who accused me of theft, and ruined my good name."

She cried out, and tried to pull him back, but it was too late. Vincent had turned and seen him. A start of surprise, a broad smile, that was all, but it spoke volumes. He was shaking hands with the doctor as the two came up.

"I think we have met before, Mr. Vincent," said Jack, in a hard voice.

The doctor heard the name, but knowing nothing of the truth (for Elise had been the only one Jack had told), failed to realise the nature of the calamity that had happened.

"I never expected to find you here, Denham," said Vincent, dryly. "I wondered where you had—er—run to; this explains it."

Peter was looking from one to the other, innocent of the harm he had done.

"I met my friend on the cliff road," he said simply to the doctor. "He was going to stay with friends, and so I asked him to turn in here for a bit just to see me. You don't mind, do you?"

"Not at all, Peter," said the old man kindly, "bring your friend in by all means."

They entered the hall. Elise, at a sign from Jack went upstairs.

"Quite a merry party, eh, Doctor Watman?" said Vincent, cheerily, as he strolled across to the fireplace. "I never thought when I came along here that I should have the pleasure of seeing Mr. Jack Denham."

"I suppose not," said the old man. "He is here for his health, Mr. Vincent, I may tell you at once, and, as a matter of fact, not allowed to see visitors."

Vincent, realising by the doctor's manner that Jack had not given him away, felt a sense of relief. He was safe at any rate, which would not have been the case had the other broken his word. But, after all, he reflected, had he not known that Jack Denham's word was good, Jack would not have left Normanton Hall alive. He turned affably to the old doctor.

"In that case I must apologise for my intrusion here. But I hope you will relax rules

a little in my case, for I would like very much to have a word with your—er patient, is he, or—er—inmate ? "

" Patient, Mr. Vincent," replied Watman quietly. Somehow he did not care very much for this young man, and hoped he would go soon. He was annoyed that Peter had brought him in without permission, but, since Peter could not be regarded as responsible for his actions, he had to let it pass. But the gate-keeper should have his instructions and in the meantime he must try and get rid of this man as soon as possible.

" I will make an exception in your case," he replied, " as you are a friend of his, but it must only be for ten minutes." And then he left them.

Peter, who had been watching his friend Jack, with the uncanny intuition of those of his mentality, sensed something wrong. He couldn't make out what it was, and he wanted to find out if he could ; so, while the doctor was speaking, he, meaning no evil, and wishful only to help his friend, stepped unnoticed behind the heavy curtains in the big window and listened. That all was not well he knew. He had made some big mistake in bringing this man here. He must, therefore, find out what it was, and see what could be done to rectify it.

" So this is where you are skulking, is it ? " said Vincent, as the door closed behind the doctor.

"That's a damned lie," retorted Jack angrily. "I am here because my brother brought me, by force, if you want to know."

"Poor martyr!" sneered Vincent. "Pining away in hopeless captivity! Well, the gods are evidently working on my side for I have found you in spite of all your precious brother's elaborate manœuvres, and I'll make it my business to let Jim Sullivan know as soon as possible. I'm staying with friends in the neighbourhood so I'll 'phone from there. What a bit of blind luck for us, and what a cursed bore for you! Jim will think nothing of waiting his chance of a pot shot at you from one of those walls. He'll just love it, and you can't warn them here, for that would mean your giving me away, and if you do that you know what's in store for your damned brother and his girl, so I've just got you on toast."

"I begin to think that you are the worst of the whole dirty gang," said Jack in utter disgust, "not even excepting Jim Sullivan."

"Of course," went on Vincent, ignoring the other's remark, "Jim will prefer it if he can get hold of you alive, and put you to death in his own funny little way. But he can't afford to go on losing men as he is doing, first Gaston and then Alf, so something has to be done quickly."

"I most sincerely trust you will be the next," said Jack with great fervour. "The man who does you in will be worthy of a crown in heaven."

Later, how bitterly did he regret those words.

"Well, that's your opinion," replied the other carelessly, "and you know how much people prize that." He turned and glanced round the hall. "You've got a bright and roomy gaol here. Any girls? Or aren't they allowed either?"

"You hold your damned tongue," said Jack furiously.

"Oh, so there are! Well, you're not so badly off after all. But I suppose I must tear myself away, the ten minutes' interview behind bars must be nearly over, and I think I hear the doughty governor returning. How many gaolers do they put over you?"

"You had better clear out before I hurt you," snapped Jack.

"No, no, my dear fellow, no violence, it doesn't pay in these kind of places. If I know anything of rules and regulations, it means the black hole or padded cell or something nasty of that sort, and I should hate to think of you in either of them on my account."

He turned as Doctor Watman came in, and Peter slipped through the open window out on to the terrace.

"Is time up, doctor?" asked Vincent. "Your charge seems in fairly good health and strength, if I may judge from his remarks. You do the inmates very well here, I gather."

"Patients," repeated the doctor calmly.

"Yes, I am happy to say he has greatly improved since he came."

"And how long is he in for—I mean here for?"

"Until he is well," was the reply, "and certain grave disorders that may cause great trouble and even threaten possible death are removed. The time is indefinite."

"Quite neatly put, eh, Denham?" said Vincent, with a wink. "Well, so long, I expect I'll see you again shortly. Keep smiling, I'll remember to give your messages and love to dear friend Jim." Jack said nothing, and Vincent did not attempt to shake hands. He got into the car and then looked round.

"Where's Peter?" he asked. "I want to say good-bye to Peter. Ah, there you are."

For Peter, who had come through the window, was beside him, smiling up into his face and apparently unconscious of the harm he had done.

"I've seen nothing of you, Bob," he said. "Are you going?"

"Unfortunately, I must," said he, with a grim smile.

"Then I'll go with you for a bit along the road and walk back. How will that do?"

"Splendid!" said the other, and Peter, with a glance at the doctor, who nodded approval, got in.

Musgrave turned to the doctor, "I'll go with him, sir," he said, and sprang into the car.

"I'll only take him a short run, doctor," called out Vincent. "S'long! Cheerio, Denham." He waved a hand to the scowling face and drove off.

"A cool hand that," thought Jack, grimly. "I wonder if—but hang it! What else could I have done? I gave my word and must just trust to luck. Poor old Peter, he has no idea of the harm he has done. I hope that scoundrel won't hurt him." He stood on the terrace steps looking anxiously down the drive.

The old doctor at his side gave a sigh. "I'm glad Peter has met a friend," he said, "it will cheer him up. Though," he added, frowning slightly, "I can't say that I care much for Mr. Vincent, though perhaps it is hardly fair to judge on so short an acquaintance."

"I don't agree with you," replied Jack, with a grin. "I'm all for first impressions myself. It's marvellous how right one can be sometimes. I don't like Vincent myself, and—er—if I may be allowed to proffer some advice, I shouldn't encourage our only Peter to see any more of him. I hope he'll be all right," he added, as a sudden uneasy sensation came to him.

"Musgrave's with him," said the doctor. "He's just devoted to Peter. But I think you are right, my boy, I won't allow Vincent in here again."

It was at that moment that Elise came back into the room, and as the doctor left them she

went up to Jack and looked anxiously in his face.

"I heard what he said, Jack. So it was Robert Vincent?"

"I wonder," said Jack, by way of reply, "how long it will be before dear old Jim starts looking me up."

Elise put her hands on his shoulders and looked anxiously into his eyes. "You must tell Doctor Watman, Jack," she said.

"I can't, my dear, any more than you can. But don't worry. It's a bore he knows where I am, but he can't do anything. Jim and his gang can't get in and they certainly can't get me out, so I really don't see what good his knowledge will do him."

But Elise Allwood was not easily deceived. "You are only saying that to ease my mind," she said quietly, "but it does nothing of the sort. Common sense tells me that it is nothing short of a calamity that Vincent has found you, and I don't care what promises I made you. Honour can go to the four winds if you are in danger. I shall tell the doctor. Besides," she added, "we can't let anything poor Peter did in all innocence turn out a calamity for you." Jack smiled.

"My blessed angel," he said. "That sort of argument won't wash, though, mark you, I allow it's clever. I believe you women could argue us into believing the devil a saint if you wanted to, and prove it, what's more. But it won't do. I had no right to tell you

about Vincent, but a man keeps no secrets from his wife, and you are practically that now. No, my dear, wait a bit, I promise you I'll take no risks, besides I have no right to, now that you belong to me and I to you."

"I'm afraid the doctor was right when he said I had taken on more than I could manage," sighed Elise, "though he thinks that perhaps in time I shall be able to keep you in order." They strolled away into the garden, and for a time Vincent, Sullivan, and all connected with them was forgotten.

It was nearly two hours later that they heard running footsteps on the gravel road. Already it was growing dark and the light was lit in the hall. Jack and Elise were together on the sofa, the doctor pacing anxiously up and down the room. It was long past the time when Peter should have returned. From uneasiness he gave way to genuine anxiety. What could have happened? Jack, more anxious even than the doctor—for with his greater knowledge of the man who had taken Peter off he had greater reason—tried to reassure him. Any old thing such as tyre trouble might have happened, he argued, or Vincent might have forgotten the time, and——

It was then that footsteps were heard outside, the door was flung open, and Musgrave, his face like chalk, his hands bleeding and clothes torn, tottered into the hall.

"Oh, my God," he said, "they're gone! They are both gone!" Then he gave a lurch

forward, but caught at a table for support. By this time the doctor and Jack were beside him and gently helped him into a chair.

"Get me some brandy from the dining-room, Denham," said the old man.

"Oh! What has happened?" cried Elise. "Where is Peter?"

"Wait, my dear, let him drink this first, he's too far gone to speak, poor fellow."

Presently the attendant raised his head. "Thank you, sir. I'll try and tell you. It was no one's fault—nothing could have stopped him. He went out to do it, I know that now."

"Yes, yes, man. Tell us what happened."

"It was on the cliff road—you know those awful rocks, sir, and how dangerous the road is there, with those useless railings? Mr. Peter, sir, he was sitting by the driver, and chatting away, like you know he does, when suddenly he turns round to me. 'Old son,'—says he,"—here the man suddenly choked, and the doctor laid a gentle hand on his shoulder—"'Old son—tell those two, I wish them luck and happiness, all they deserve. I rather fancy they'll pull it off to-day,' and then, he says"—here the man paused once more, and gulped hard—"he says, 'you've been a brick to me—God bless you. Tell Jack I'm going to gain a crown in heaven,' and the next minute, before I could gather my wits together he had wrenched the wheel round and flung himself across Mr. Vincent. We were going pretty fast—I had got to my feet, and

the sudden swerve of the car and crash, as she hit the rails, sent me off my balance. The next instant, Mr. Peter had flung out an arm and given me a violent push. I was thrown out of the car and on to the edge of the cliff, and I saw—oh, my God! will it ever leave my memory while I live!—I saw the car go over. I heard a scream from Mr. Vincent, and a laugh from Mr. Peter. You know that cliff, sir, and just there, there's a sort of hole. You remember a cow fell down there last year, and had to be left. Well, that's where they went down, smashed to bits they must have been long before they reached the bottom."

There was a pause, the old doctor had sunk into a chair and buried his face in his hands. Jack, white-faced, horror-stricken, stood there unable to utter a word, while Elise, on the sofa, where she had collapsed, sobbed unrestrainedly.

"I crawled over, part way down, to see if I could—could—do anything," went on the man, in a choking voice; "but there was nothing to be done, sir, nothing—nothing. Poor Mr. Peter, I was that fond of him! And to think —I shan't see him again—no more walks—no more games—oh, it's cruel, hard! My God! It's cruel, hard! I would sooner——" A sob choked the rest of his words.

The doctor put a kindly hand on his shoulder.

"Poor fellow," he said, "I know, I know. We were all fond of Peter," his voice shook, but with an effort he got control of himself. "Do you think, then, that he meant to do

this when he went off with him, or was it only a sudden idea—a mad craze? You know, Musgrave, there were times when he was almost violent."

"Oh, no, sir, it wasn't that. He was as sane as you or I when he did it. He must have had some idea something was wrong, that Mr. Vincent was an enemy of Mr. Denham's. Perhaps he heard something in the hall, for I saw him come out of the window looking rather queer—scared-like——"

"What?" broke in Jack. "You saw him come out of the window?" There was horror in his eyes. "Then he must have heard what Vincent and I were saying. Good God, doctor, this is all my fault." Hurriedly, in halting, shaken words, he explained the facts to the two men. "I never knew he was there!" he ended, with a groan. "Oh! I'll never forgive myself, never. What a curse I am to everyone! The sooner they come and pot me off, the better."

Quietly, the old doctor reasoned with him.

"You can't blame yourself, my boy," he said. "You could not in honour go back on your word to Vincent, and you did not know that Peter was there and heard. Of course, it explains everything. He knew he had done wrong in bringing Vincent here, and he tried to make good, poor fellow. He knew that if Vincent lived to 'phone to his friends it would probably mean your death, Jack. He deliberately, therefore, made up his mind as to

what he should do. Call it murder if you will, it is not so to me, and I doubt if the Recording Angel will mark it down against him. It will be called insanity, of course—the act of a madman, which I suppose it was after all."

"He was as sane as you, sir, when he did it," said Musgrave, doggedly. "If it were not so, would he have pushed me deliberately out of the car?"

"I wonder," said the doctor. "I wonder."

CHAPTER VIII

TWO WOMEN

DR. WATMAN paced slowly along the wide stone terrace in front of his house, his hands clasped behind him, his head bent. By his side walked a powerfully built man, who every now and then glanced at him anxiously.

"Sit down, sir, won't you?" he said. "You will tire yourself, and God knows you have been through enough already without that."

"No, Musgrave, I'm better on my feet, I can't keep still," said the old doctor. "I want to think——"

"Don't do that, sir, thinking does no good, but talking does. I know a good deal of what has happened, sir, but I don't rightly know it all, and if you wouldn't mind, sir, I should be grateful if you would tell me exactly what has been going on these last two months," said the man.

He knew that it was better for the doctor to talk than to think, and he wanted, in his rough way to help him.

"Tell me what you know, Musgrave," said Dr. Watman.

"I know that Mr. Jack Denham has got mixed up in a lot of trouble, and had his life threatened, and that's why he is here with you, out of harm's way. I know that the lady, Mrs. Allwood, who is here for a rest cure, and to whom he is now engaged, was the lady who rang up her brother on the telephone in London, over two months ago, asking him to go to her rescue as her drunken husband was threatening to kill her. From what I understand Exchange rang up Mr. Denham instead, by mistake, and he went. But how he got mixed up with that gang of criminals I don't know."

"It was very simple," said the doctor. "He thought she said her number was 18, Staveley Road, and it was 80; he went to No. 18 and got trapped in a gambling hell. He escaped with his life. But since then he has been threatened by them with death and three times they have nearly succeeded. You know Mr. Denham, Musgrave, threats only make him the more determined; so at last his brother, Captain Denham, brought him here out of harm's way."

"Well, I expect the police will get on to them soon," said Musgrave. "Inspector Harper of the Yard, is helping, isn't he?"

"Yes," replied the doctor. "He's a good man. All they want now is to spot the house where Sullivan and his gang meet. If Mr.

Denham knew the place, I would be inclined to let him go and help them, but he doesn't, and that means danger."

"From what I know of Mr. Denham, sir," said the other quietly, "I doubt his wanting to help the police. He wants to get on to the gang himself, and get some of his own back. It's mad, of course, but I can quite understand it after all he's gone through."

"Well, he'll never be allowed to do that while I can prevent it," said the doctor. "His brother, before he went, pointed out that if this gang ever found out his present whereabouts, they would resort to every possible means of getting hold of him. They might even, he said, try ringing him up or wiring in Mr. Denham's name, and that unless I was absolutely certain the message came from him, I was not to let him go. So you see how strongly he thinks about it. However, now that he has met the lady of his heart and they are together here, I don't worry so much about Mr. Jack Denham. Nothing short of force will get him away from here."

They talked on. The evening was drawing in. Up and down the two men paced, until the gong sent the doctor up to his room to change for dinner. He reflected that the meal would be a gloomy one. There was no Peter Smithson there to liven them up with his sometimes nonsensical, sometimes most wise remarks. Only Jack Denham and Elise Allwood, happy together in their love, but a happiness

spoilt for them by the tragedy that had happened.

Before the gong sounded for the evening meal, the three strolled on to the terrace. Away in the woods, owls hooted eerily; across the lawn was the sparkle and glimmer of the lake.

"It's getting chilly," said the old doctor. "Elise, my dear, you should go in."

"No," she said, "not yet. Let us walk a bit longer. Neither Jack nor I can sit still, you know."

It was then that Barton, one of the attendants, hurried out on to the terrace.

"Is Mr. Denham there, sir?" he asked.

"Yes," said Jack. "What is it?"

"There's a trunk call for you, sir—London—a lady wants to speak to you urgently. Will you come?"

"A lady?" said Jack. "Who on earth can it be? No one knows I am here." He hurried inside, the other two following directly behind.

Jack took up the receiver. "Yes," he said. "Who is it—speak slower—yes—good God! You! How did you know I was here? What Edward! They've got him—he's what?—Being starved to death! No—no! I don't believe it—this is a plant to get me—no—I see——. Yes, I believe you—I'll come now, of course—but I must go for the police—you know that. Oh, very well—for your sake, I promise—I'll come alone, and I'll wait at the

rooms in Lennox Street until you ring up and say you are by yourself. Thank you, kid. Tell him I'm coming—I won't fail—yes, I know the house—Brandscomes. God bless you for what you are doing."

The receiver went down, and Jack, white-faced, turned to the others.

"It's Edward——" he said hoarsely. "They've got him and are starving him into telling them where I am. Will you let me have your car, Elise?"

"Wait, Denham," said the doctor quietly. "What is all this? Tell me quietly, who rang you up?"

"The girl Molly, one of the gang," he said. "The girl who twice saved my life—she says they have got Edward—down in a cellar and are starving him. I must go at once, doctor."

"Wait——" he said again. "How comes it that she was able to ring you up? She says your brother is to be starved into telling them where you are. How is that—if she already knows?"

"She says she got a chance to get to him when they were out of the house, and he gave her my address——"

"Edward gave it," repeated the doctor.

"Yes——" said Jack, desperately. "She won't tell them, she wants me to go and help to get him away, as she can't move the trap-door herself, and if he isn't moved soon, he will, through very pain and weakness, give in and tell them what they want to know, and she

doesn't want me hurt. Can't you see, doctor? It's all quite plain to me."

"And it is equally plain to me," was the quiet reply.

"Who is this girl?" demanded Elise. "Can she be relied on? Can any of them? Isn't she fooling you, Jack?"

"No," he said. "She wouldn't lie to me—besides, the proof of it is that she knows where I am. No one but Eddy would tell her—or could. Can't you see that?"

"Stop a minute," said the old man. "Let us get this right. She knows where you are. Well, the last person in the world to tell her is Edward, your brother. No—wait until I have done. Now—think a bit! Yesterday comes Robert Vincent in this neighbourhood. Why? He says to stay with friends. Obviously that was a lie, and is proved so now. They must have traced you here, and he came down to see if it were true. Possibly he knew his one-time friend, Peter Smithson, was shut up here, and failing to meet him outside he would boldly call, and find out. He was spared that by meeting him. He was expected back—something prevents—his friends suspect that he may be detained here. So, in order to get you, they try ringing up this house, where they suspect you are, and tell you this insane yarn about your brother. My dear fellow, it is as clear as daylight. A very clever scheme, I grant you, but in this instance it fails."

"Fails! How?" demanded Jack.

"It fails simply because they will not get you that way," said the old man, quietly.

"What?" exclaimed the young man angrily. "Do you mean that you don't believe this girl is telling me the truth, and that you will prevent my going? My God, man, Edward is calling for me. I must go—I am bound to go! Elise, for God's sake let me have your car—I've got to go—to-night—now—there's not a moment to be lost. How long do I know he has been there? And then when I get to my rooms, I have to wait until she rings me up to say the coast is clear. Elise, for God's sake, speak!"

"Oh, Jack——" she cried—"What am I to say?" She clasped her hands in agony. "I know you think the girl is telling the truth, but I can't believe it. Why should she?"

"Why?" he cried. "Why? I'll tell you why." He was desperate and did not weigh his words. "I believe she likes me, cares for me—that's why she helped me before. That's why she doesn't want Eddy to give in and tell them where I am. That's why! She is nothing to me, you know that—but—well, surely you, a woman, can understand."

For a moment Elise Allwood stood silent, a deep, angry flush on her face. This girl—this criminal, this low, vulgar harlot, to dare to care for her Jack in that way! Indignation kept her silent.

"Elise!" he cried. "For God's sake say something—tell them to get your car—I must

have it—I must! By God!" he cried angrily turning to the silent doctor. "If you try to stop me you'll be sorry for it. Tell them to get the car round, do you hear?"

For answer the old man put his hand behind him and pressed the electric bell twice.

"Yes," he said. "Wait a minute, my boy. Don't get into this excited state. Try and calm yourself, and get the hang of the thing. Surely you can see that you are being duped. Surely you can see that this is a trap into which you are going to walk blindly. Ah! There you are, Musgrave—and you, Barton. Just stand by those two doors, I don't want anyone to leave here just for the moment——"

The two men took up their places, and stood motionless. Jack, white with anger now, glared at the doctor.

Elise caught his arm. "Jack, Jack," she said, "don't do anything foolish. Wait, dear old boy, let us think and talk a bit before we decide to do anything."

"Talk!" he echoed. "We have done enough of that; while we stand talking here Eddy is being tortured over there. I have got to go to him. Look here——" he turned desperately to the doctor, "you doubt that girl, and I acknowledge that it is quite natural, for you don't know her, and I do. But to satisfy me and yourself, for God's sake ring up Mrs. Jenkins, our servant at the rooms in Lennox Street. If Eddy is not there you will know what she says is true."

"That is an excellent idea," said Doctor Watman. He turned to the telephone. "It will be some time before we get on, I fear." he said. "However, I am prepared to wait all night if it will bring you ease of mind, my dear boy. The only thing I am not prepared to do, until I am satisfied, is to let you go on this worse than wild goose chase."

Jack paced up and down the hall in gloomy silence. Elise sat still thinking hard. Gradually a feeling was beginning to dawn on her that after all, this girl, who loved her Jack might be speaking the truth. At least she would not of her own act get him into danger. Therefore, unless it was to save his brother, and incidentally himself, for she believed it possible for Edward to give way under torture, why should she call for him to come? It was pretty evident that unless the doctor had distinct proof of Jack's immunity from harm he would not let him go, and a plan began to form in her mind.

At last the tension was broken by the ringing of the bell.

The doctor spoke. "Yes, is that Mrs. Jenkins? Doctor Watman speaking. Is Mr. Edward Denham at home? Oh, staying with friends. A slight accident, you say. Did he say who he was staying with? Ah, that's a pity. You are not anxious on his account? That's all right then. He often stays a night with friends, does he? Good! Yes, thanks

—he is quite well. No, nothing more, thanks. Good-bye."

"So——" said Jack eagerly. "He's not there—well—are you satisfied now, doctor?"

"I am more than satisfied that this is a most deliberate and well thought out plan," was the reply. "Not only do they try and make you believe that cock and bull story, but they give verisimilitude to it, knowing that you would naturally ring up Jenkins, by causing your brother to meet with a slight accident, possibly a taxi run into by another, and he goes to a friend's house for the night. Your brother has hosts of friends in London. He would ask to be taken to the nearest, and Jenkins would be informed."

"You are mad, doctor," cried Jack. "If Eddy had gone to a friend's house, he would have told Jenkins who it was. Man, man! Can't you see? Won't you see? Are you blind to what is so obvious to me? No—I suppose you can't see—but by God—you won't stop me from going to him. I'll go if I have to fight my way out," and with that he had gone to the door. "Stand aside, and let me pass," he said to Musgrave who barred his way. "You have no right to stop me, and I'm going—d'you hear? Stand out of my way or——"

He raised a threatening arm, and the next instant was lying his length on the floor, with Musgrave kneeling beside him, one knee on his chest.

"Oh, don't let them hurt him," cried Elise, clinging to the old man.

"All right, my dear," he said, quietly. "They know better than that, have no fear. Besides, I expect your young man realises now that this sort of thing won't do."

"Come, sir," said Musgrave. "Don't struggle, or I'm afraid I shall hurt you. Take it quietly, sir."

There was a moment's pause.

"All right," said Jack. "Let go—I see it's no use." He rose to his feet. "You will regret this one day, doctor," he said through set teeth.

"I regret it now, bitterly," said the old man. "But there was no other course. Yes, Musgrave, take Mr. Denham upstairs. I'll come and see him presently, and after he has had his dinner I will bring something to make him sleep."

Elise watched them go. Her heart bled for her boy, for she knew that he must be right, yet she was powerless to help, and she knew, also, that nothing she could say would alter the doctor's determination. He too, felt that he was right. Well, between them, these men had made a desperate mess of things. It was left to her, a woman, to try and put them right.

The meal was a gloomy one, and they were both thankful when it was over.

"I'm going up to my room," she said, presently. "It has all upset me horribly

but I don't see what else you could have done, and I don't see Jack doing other than he did. May I see him to say 'good-night?'"

"Of course, my dear, and try and make him see reason. I hate the necessity for my action, but he left me nothing else to do. Good-night, my dear."

She left him and hurried upstairs. Already that plan, so vaguely thought of had matured.

The door was opened at her knock.

"I want to see Mr. Denham," she said to Barton.

"Yes, madam, he is in his sitting-room."

She hurried in. Jack was pacing up and down liked a caged beast. He glared at her for a moment and then caught her in his arms.

"Thank you for coming, dear," he said. "I'm in hell. I know I'm right, and if something isn't done, I shall go mad. That brute Musgrave was too many for me. My God! Can nothing be done?"

"Yes, dear," she said. "I'm going myself to-morrow."

"You are going where?" he demanded, incredulous, amazed.

"I am going up in the car to-morrow to take your place," she repeated. "You must write a letter to Mrs. Jenkins, telling her that I may stay at your rooms, and you must tell me how to find this house at Golder's Green. For I'm going there, and nothing shall stop me. The girl wants help, and I

am strong—between us, dear old boy, the two women who love Jack Denham, shall rescue his brother. No—don't look like that, or argue, I have made up my mind, and I am going."

"I won't let you," he cried. "Think of the risk. Oh, my God! Elise, you must not dream of it. It is wonderful and brave of you, but I won't let you do it."

"Risk! There is no risk!" she said. "You believe that the girl is telling the truth, don't you?"

"Of course, I know it!" he said. "But you can't go to that place alone—I won't let you!"

"And how are you going to prevent me? You poor boy, you can't even help yourself. Doctor Watman will keep you here until you, as he thinks, come to your senses. You can't stop me, and if you tell him, it will make no difference. I am my own mistress. I shall go for a drive in my car to-morrow, no one will prevent me, and I shall simply start right off to London. Now, sit down and write that letter to Mrs. Jenkins, and then describe this house to me."

Jack argued, pleaded——. At last seeing the futility of all arguments, all entreaties, and desperately anxious for his brother he gave in, and did her bidding.

"You are the most wonderful woman in all the world," he said, hoarsely, as he folded her in his arms.

"I'm only an ordinary, sensible human being," she said. "This is the only thing to do, and therefore I am going to do it. I'll 'phone as soon as I have got your brother safe. You see, I have no idea of failing. Now, dear, promise to be quiet and give no more trouble. It does no good you know."

"I promise," he said. "Anything you tell me, darling, there is nothing that I would not do for you."

"That's brave of you," said she, tenderly. "Far braver than what I am doing. For I risk nothing. Good-bye, dear."

She was gone.

It was a very quiet and altogether docile Jack Denham whom the doctor found when he came up a short time afterwards, and he took the draught he gave him and drank it without a protest.

"You'll think differently about it all, after a good night's rest, my boy," he said kindly. "It's wonderful," he thought as he left the room, "what power a good woman has over a man."

* * * * * * * *

Elise Allwood, at breakfast, calmly announced her intention of motoring up to London.

"I am not satisfied," she said, in answer to the doctor's mild protest. "And so I'm going to find out for myself."

"But what can you possibly do?" he inquired, in blank astonishment.

"I can do what any ordinary sensible woman can do, I suppose. Make inquiries, and failing any satisfactory replies, I can call in Inspector Harper."

"But, my dear, it is not a woman's job," he protested.

"You are old-fashioned, doctor,' she retorted. "Any job is a woman's job nowadays. The War altered all that for us. Thank God I am strong and well again, and I'll do what I can to help Jack. Of course, I quite see your point of view, and appreciate it; you could not, after what his brother said, do anything else; but there is also the chance that Jack may be right, and as another person's life depends on it, I feel it my duty at least to do what I can to find out. Jack can't go, but I can. So that's all there is about it. I'll ring you up as soon as I know one way or the other."

She waved protests and arguments aside. To a suggestion that Musgrave should accompany her, she laughed. "I want no blundering men on this job," she said. "It's entirely a woman's affair. Jack knows all about it, and carried on about the risk in the same ridiculous way that you are doing. There's no risk at all, I assure you. I'm going—so that's all there is about it."

And of course, she went.

She reached Lennox Street late that night, and presented Jack's letter to the surprised Mrs. Jenkins.

"Very good, ma'am," she said, when she

had read it. "I'll have dinner brought in directly." Herbert told her where the garage was, and when she had taken the car round, and intimated that it might be wanted at any moment, she returned to the rooms in Lennox Street.

"I can't understand about Captain Denham, ma'am," said young Jenkins, as he arranged the things on the dining-table. "He gave no address, and we have heard nothing since. I am beginning to be rather afraid that something serious has happened."

"That's why I am here," she said. "Have there been any calls on the telephone, Jenkins?"

"Not for the last two days, ma'am," he replied.

So the girl was not ready for her yet. If it was true, then poor Edward Denham had been in those brutes' hands for two days and nights. How long, she wondered, could one exist without food and drink? Her heart misgave her. Ought she not to fling honour to the winds and call in the police? Jack had promised the girl to go alone, and therefore she was in honour bound to do the same, as she went in his place. But, did not the circumstances give her the right to fling all that aside and go before it was too late, with sufficient force to break in and——? No, it did not. It was not playing the game. If the girl spoke the truth, she was risking a good deal herself to save Edward Denham. It was not for Elise to punish her for what she did, and that is

what it meant if she brought in the police. Jack would not have done so, therefore neither could she. She ate her meal, and afterwards paced the room in ceaseless anxiety. When twelve o'clock struck and still there was no telephone call she went to bed. All the following morning, and all the afternoon she waited, her heart sinking as each hour dragged by. How long could Edward hold out? Nearly three days now. What state would he be in when she found him? Nine o'clock—half-past. At last! A violent ring close by her brought her with a cry to the 'phone—she deepened her voice as she spoke.

"Yes—who is it?"

"Is that you, boy?" came a woman's voice.

"Yes, Jack Denham speaking," said she.

"Come at once—I am alone for the next two hours. Bring a flask with brandy, I have none and dare not leave. Hurry, boy."

"I'm off now," said Elise. She rang for Jenkins. "Get Captain Denham's room ready," she said hurriedly. "I have just heard about him, and shall be bringing him here—he is ill. See to everything, Jenkins, I must go."

She left the bewildered manservant and hurried to the car. Soon she was navigating the crowded streets, coolly and calmly steering her way through. If ever coolness and courage were to stand her in good stead, now was the occasion. But she never lost her nerves, though they were strung to breaking point.

Finchley Road had to be gained and then the broad highway to Golder's Green. In her pocket was a flask of brandy. So, Edward must be weak, poor fellow. Well, thank God, she was unusually strong for a woman, and the Cornish air had braced her into health and strength again. Finchley Road at last—and now the houses were growing fewer. She glanced at her watch as she passed a street lamp. Ten o'clock. An hour and a half to do it in—surely that would be time enough? Unless these people returned before their time. But she would not consider that for a moment. The girl had said she would be two hours alone. That was enough for her to think about. At last the curiously coloured gates were reached, and they were open. She swept round the curve, drew up at the entrance door of a modern villa, and sprang out. As she reached the top step the door was opened noiselessly. It was dark outside, for there were clouds over the moon.

"Is it you, boy?" came a voice.

And without answering she squeezed past the opening. "Yes," she said. "It's me."

The passage was in darkness.

"Who are you?" came a voice, close by her.

"Is there a light anywhere?" said Elise. "I am Jack Denham's friend. He can't come himself, so I am here instead. Take me to the light so that you can see."

"A woman!" said the voice, incredulously.

"Yes, a woman—but strong and able to help."

She felt a hand clutch her wrist, and then found herself being hurried along a narrow passage. A door was opened, and they were in a lighted room. She looked at the girl before her—dark—pretty, but pale as death and with wide, staring eyes.

"How is it you have come, and not—him?" she demanded.

"He can't come," replied Elise, quietly. "He is detained there by Dr. Watman, who won't let him go, for he believes your call was a hoax——"

"And you—didn't you believe that too?" asked the other, with a short laugh.

"Why, no, or I wouldn't be here now."

"I suppose the police are with you?" said Molly in a hard voice.

"Of course not—Jack promised to go alone, so of course I had to do the same."

"Is this true?" she demanded. "You came here alone? *Here?*"

"Of course," said Elise, simply. "Why not? I knew you would not hurt me, and you were by yourself."

"I might not have been—and it might after all have been a—hoax—as you call it," said the girl dryly.

"I know—but I had to risk that," was the reply.

"You are brave," said Molly, in a different tone, and now there was admiration in her

eyes. "And you are beautiful. I suppose you have come for Jack's sake, you love him? That's it isn't it?"

"Yes," said Elise, simply. "I love him, so I'm here, you see it's all quite simple, and you who love him too, will know how little danger and risk counts, when you want to help the man you love."

"What do you know about me?" demanded the other, flushing angrily.

"Only what Jack has told me. How you saved him twice, and now this—what you are doing for him. Do you think it was so difficult to guess?"

"I suppose not—and I suppose you hate me for it, and despise me—you know what I am, what my life is. You and your Jack are not of my world. Aren't you afraid to come here?"

"Afraid? Why?" said Elise. "And why should I hate and despise you? Far from it, I admire you tremendously. I think you are wonderful. You have played the game all through with Jack—you are playing it now, risking perhaps your life. Hate you, despise you! Oh, no, no! A thousand times no!"

"You say this—you?" cried the other, staring at her—"And yet you know what I am, and that I love your Jack—you say this to me?"

"Why, yes—it's because I am so sorry—sorry that Jack can never be anything to you. For you see, I know what it is to love him,

and when love is a joy to me who possess him, it can only be a tragedy for the woman who loses him. Oh, Molly, don't cry, dear, you must keep strong if we are to help this poor man. There, my dear, kiss me." She threw her arms round the girl's shaking shoulders and drew her close.

At last the sobs ceased, and Molly drew herself out of the other's embrace, and looked up into her face. "You are a good woman," she said. "Just the right woman for Jack. And you are the first woman of your sort who has ever thought me fit to—kiss——! I won't forget that. It has done me good, I feel somehow different to what I have ever done before. Even Jack is not quite good enough for you. Come, let's get to work," she went on, suddenly stooping and raising the carpet. "That poor man is sick down there. I haven't been able to get near him. Have you brandy, you'll want it."

Elise showed her flask.

"Now, help me," went on Molly. "It's this trap-door I can't raise. I'm not strong, you see."

"I am," said Elise.

She knelt down and exerted all her strength. At first she thought that even she must fail, but at last it moved, and she got one hand under, then both—then with the help of the other, they turned it crashing on to the floor.

"It's all right," said Molly. "There's no

one here. Do you see those steps? Well, take this candle, and go down carefully. You'll have to help him, I think he's too ill and weak to walk alone—but make him do his best. I'll wait here and help him as he comes up. Hurry, they said they would be two hours, but I'm never quite sure of them."

Elise took the candle, and scrambled down the ladder. She was horribly afraid of what she would find there. When her feet reached the ground she felt almost sick with anxiety, for there had been no sound, not even a groan. Was Edward dead? Then she turned and held up the candle. A dark figure lay on the floor close up against the wall, and the candle gleam lit up the whiteness of the face. It was Edward Denham. She had only seen him once, the day after he had brought his brother down to the house in Cornwall—and how changed now? He was staring at her.

"Is that Molly?" came a cracked voice.

She hurried to his side, and knelt down. "No, it's Elise Allwood—and I've come to help you."

"Water!" he gasped. "Water, that's all I want."

She put her arms under his shoulders and raised him up, then she put the flask to his lips. "It's only weak," she said. "But it will do you more good than plain water. Now, can you walk, do you think? Don't ask questions, I'll explain everything afterwards.

What we have to do now is to get out of this place."

"Yes, I can walk," he said.

And with her assistance he got to his feet. She put an arm round him, and somehow they reached the ladder.

"You have got to get up there," said Elise. "You must forget how ill you feel, Mr. Denham, forget everything but that we have to get away from here."

"Yes," he said, "I'll do my best."

He caught at the ladder rung and she helped him. It was slow work, for he was giddy and lost his footing, but at last Molly had caught hold of him and presently he was sitting on the floor of the little room drinking thirstily of the water she gave him.

"Not too much," said Elise. "I must get him to the car, Molly."

"Yes," said the girl. "And then come back and fix me up. They have got to find me bound and gagged, or I shan't be able to account for his going—see?"

"I see," said Elise. "And of course you are right."

She got Edward Denham into the car.

"Don't leave me," he said, weakly. "That place, the dark and the cold has made a coward of me."

"You're all right," she said, gently. "And not a bit of a coward, poor dear. Just sit there, I shan't be long, I promise you." She ran back to the room.

"Take this curtain cord," said Molly. "It will look more natural, and tie my handkerchief round my mouth." She sat down on the sofa. "Tie it tight," she said, "so that I can't get out of it, or they'll smell a rat—they're damned cute all of 'em."

Elise did as she bade her. "I'm afraid it hurts, Molly," she said, frowning.

"I can't help it if it does—hurry—do! Now, my ankles, with the other end."

Then she took the handkerchief, but first stooped down and kissed her. "God bless you, Molly," she said. Then she tied the handkerchief over her mouth. "Hadn't I better turn out the light? I see you've left the trap-door open? Nod, if yes—and shake, if you mean no."

Molly nodded her head. Then the room was in darkness, and Elise Allwood went out. In the car she gave him brandy again.

"Don't try to talk," she said. "We'll get home first."

Young Jenkins met her at the door. At the sight of his master's white, worn face, he uttered a gasp of horror.

"Help him in, Jenkins. I'll tell you all about it later. Has anyone rung me up?"

"Mr. Jack Denham rung up an hour ago to ask if you were here. I told him you had gone out to bring back Mr. Edward." They were up the stairs now, and inside the sitting-room.

"Get him to bed, Jenkins, I'll ring up the doctor and Jack."

Edward Denham turned to her. "I want to see Doctor Watman," he said. "Tell him to come. But first, I want to thank you——"

"Ah, no," she cried. "Please don't. I came only because the doctor wouldn't let Jack go—he thought it was a plant you see. Now go to bed, please. Dr. Watman will be here to-morrow and look after you. In the meantime I'll do my best until he comes."

Edward Denham raised her hand to his lips. "You are the bravest woman I know," he said, hoarsely.

"Don't do that," said Elise, unsteadily. "You are going to be my brother, so I may call you Edward, and you—may kiss me properly, if you like."

"I'm glad," he said. "Glad—Jack wants someone like you to look after him." Then he kissed her tenderly and left her.

She turned to the 'phone. At the other end the doctor held the receiver and Jack Denham waited by his side.

"Hurry up, doctor. What does she say?"

There was a long pause while the old man listened. "Yes," he said. "Yes—at once! I'll come by the early train. Thank God! Thank God! I shall never forgive myself for this." Then he turned to Jack. "It's all right," he said, huskily. "She found your brother—he's ill, but will soon pull round. I am to go up to him, and will leave on the early

train. Jack, my boy, can you ever forgive me ? "

Jack caught at his hand and wrung it. " There's nothing to forgive," he said. " We were both right—you were right, and so was I—so let's forget it."

CHAPTER IX

BOLT VERSUS BAR

DR. WATMAN summoned up to London, from his nursing home in Cornwall, took one of the attendants aside.

"Look here, Musgrave," he said, "I have to go up, as you know, to London by this early train, and I want you particularly to keep your eyes open as far as Mr. Jack Denham is concerned. You know that we are keeping him here out of harm's way from that precious gang of thieves who are out to kill him—knowing as he does, too much about them. You also know that his one aim and object in life is to get at them, and get some of his own back."

"Yes, sir," said the man, grinning. "And we have to see that he doesn't."

"Quite so, nothing short of forcible measures are of any use. Therefore, while I am away I want you to be particularly careful. But I must explain the reason of my visit up to London, which will show you how serious matters are. Four days ago Mr. Edward Denham, the young man's elder brother, was trapped by this gang and has been kept in a

damp cellar without food or drink until last night, when he was rescued. They wanted to force him to tell where his brother was."

"I see, sir, pretty serious it seems to me. Isn't it possible to get on to them?"

"Impossible, at present, for this reason—there is a woman among this gang with more humanity than the rest of them. She got scared and induced Mr. Edward to give her his brother's address. She 'phoned here to him and asked him to come and help rescue his brother, as she couldn't do it alone. All this she did on condition that neither of them gave anything away to the police."

"I see the point, sir," said Musgrave.

"As you know—I, thinking it was a plant to get hold of Mr. Denham here, refused to let him go, but his fiancée, Mrs. Allwood went up herself and got Mr. Edward back to his home."

"Very plucky lady, that, sir," commented the man.

"Yes, she is wonderful. Well, now you understand," went on the old doctor. "I have to go up and see to Mr. Edward, who is ill, and I have to leave Mr. Denham in your charge. If he gets away he will make a bee line for this den of criminals, and probably get killed."

"Quite so, sir. But you have no need to worry, sir—he can't climb the wall, and the gates are always locked, and I and Barton will take it in turns to watch him."

Meanwhile, the subject of this conversation

who had been thinking pretty hard for some time, and whose fertile brain was busy with a plan, was outside the house talking to the cab-driver—the village did not boast a taxi yet—who was waiting to convey Dr. Watman to the station.

"When is the next train up to London?" he asked the man casually, with an eye towards the door, where at any moment the doctor might appear.

"One-forty, sir—getting to London about eight o'clock or so——" was the reply.

"Are you from the station?" inquired Jack, lighting a cigarette.

"No, sir, I come from the Hare and Hounds Hotel in the village."

"How far is that?"

"About a quarter of a mile off, sir, straight along the London Road."

"Oh, yes, of course, we passed it on our way here, I remember. Well, I may want to get that one-forty——"

"Shall I come here for you, sir?" asked the man.

"Good Lord, no!" said Jack, with a grimace. "No, I'll come to you, if I decide to go, so be ready, I may run it fine."

"All right, sir, I'll be there."

The doctor's voice broke in on the dialogue and Jack turned quickly. Could he have heard the last words? Well, he had to risk it.

"I'm just off," he was saying. "I'll ring you up as soon as I find out how Edward is."

"Yes, do," said Jack, eagerly. "And send Elise back. It's damned rotten being here by myself. If you had a spark of humanity in you, doc., you'd let me go with you."

"It's because I have that I don't," was the reply. "Well, good-bye, don't worry, and——" he bent down and lowered his voice—"avoid giving Musgrave and Barton any trouble, you know what I mean. It won't pay, my dear fellow."

Jack laughed. "I have experienced some of Musgrave's methods already," he said. "Don't you worry."

He stood there and watched the cab disappear down the drive. Then, his thoughts concentrating on the plan he had suddenly evolved in his mind, he turned and strolled across the lawns and down the terrace towards the lake.

The garden was large, and surrounded by high trees, at the back of which rose the solid twenty feet wall without a break until the gates were reached, and these he knew, were locked day and night.

"Rather a tough proposition," he mused, puffing away at a cigarette. "But not an impossible one. Barton and Musgrave will be damned clever men if they can keep me here, when the one thing I am determined upon is to get out." He paused, and hearing a sound behind, glanced round.

It was the man Musgrave strolling casually towards him.

"Hallo!" he said. "Want anything?"

"No, sir—thought I'd look round the garden, sir."

"And incidentally see if I was thinking of stepping lightly over that wall, I suppose. Looks simple, doesn't it?" said Jack, with quiet sarcasm. "If I didn't know you to be an ordinary sensible fellow, Musgrave, I should take you for a damn fool."

"Thank you, sir," said the man, grinning. "I had no idea you were thinking of getting over the wall, sir."

"And have I said I was?" demanded Jack, indignantly.

"Well, sir, as you seemed to suspect me of watching you, and you referred to the wall, I naturally concluded that it's what you had in your mind."

"Infernally cute of you," said Jack. "You ought to have been a detective, not a keeper. But as it happens you are wrong. Doesn't it occur to your cotton wool brain that if you go and shut a fellow up against his will that the one thing he is always thinking of, is how he is going to get away? Don't you know, you priceless innocent, that if you are told not to do anything, or go anywhere, it is the one thing you want most in life to do, and the one place you must get to or die? That's human nature, isn't it?"

"I quite understand, sir. And that's why I have come to look round the garden," and he smiled and walked on.

"He got the best of that," mused Jack. "But my time is coming."

He strolled on along the path that went the whole way round the garden and was shaded by the immense trees that grew on either side. It was these trees that Jack was banking on. Surely one of them could be found to act as a helping hand over that infernal wall! Firs were no good—they had no spreading branches. And what he wanted was a branch sticking out over the top of the wall. It would be a nasty drop on the other side, but that had to be risked. The next point was—did he find such a tree as he wanted, could he climb it without being seen? Musgrave was evidently watching him, and Musgrave was about as tough a proposition as was to be found in the place, for his strength was enormous, and, in spite of his size, he was agile as a monkey. The very man for such a position as he held.

He regretted now that all the twelve days he had been there he had never looked for such a tree before. But, after he had met Elise here, undergoing her rest cure, he had had no more thought or wish to escape. Now she was in London, and he alone, and once more the mad desire to get at his enemies and be revenged for the ills he had suffered at their hands, was uppermost with him. And now they had attacked not only himself, but his brother, and his blood boiled. Edward, Elise, and himself were the only people who knew the whereabouts of this gang's headquarters, and

because of their promise to Molly, the girl, they could not inform the police. Therefore it was up to him to see what he could do himself. But how ? That was the question. If he didn't get up to London to-day, the odds were that these blackguards would have bolted, for it was not likely they would stay in headquarters that were known to three outsiders. He glanced at his watch, nine o'clock, and the train went at 1.40. Four hours in which to think out a way of escape, and accomplish it. He continued his walk along the path, eyeing every tree he came to, and at last, at the far end of the garden he came upon one that, at a pinch and some risk, might serve. It was an oak, and its branches spread wide, one particular branch just about a yard above the top of the wall, on which he remembered were spikes, and bits of glass. The branch, too, grew thin, just where it topped the wall, and might very possibly break, in which case he would in all likelihood fall right on top of the murderous glass. Not a pleasant prospect, but, after having gone the entire round of the garden, he found it was the only tree available for his purpose. That being the case—what he had to concentrate on now, was the elimination of Musgrave.

Musgrave, prowling round as he was doing, was badly in the way. He reflected here, that one of the precious gang on the scene, with a grudge against Musgrave, and a handy weapon would be decidedly an asset. Then he laughed.

Poor Musgrave, quite a decent fellow, and only doing his duty after all. No, that sort of thinking wouldn't do, and moreover, it led nowhere. He must try strategy.

How about pretending to feel ill, and sending him for some brandy? No, that wouldn't do—in all probability he would carry him in, straight away, and deposit him upstairs in bed, which would be fatal. Besides, it was too soon, and they would catch him outside if he got to the station before the train was due to start. He had to time his escape pretty accurately, which was a confounded nuisance.

How about a game of tennis with Barton, the other attendant? He knew he could play, for Barton had told him so, when he was chatting to him in his bedroom. He would get him to play and keep him at it. Jack himself never got tired playing tennis, Barton probably would. Also, the presence of Barton as an opponent would eliminate the necessity for Musgrave as a guard. They would only be there one at a time, one to relieve the other, and when he had tired Barton out, he would send him in to fetch Musgrave to carry on until lunch time. That would be the psychological moment for his attempted escape. He would only have a few minutes to do it in, but that ought to suffice. There was no car here, the attendants would have to follow on foot, in the meantime he would be in the only available cab in the village. It all sounded feasible, and practicable. The only hitch that might

occur would be the inopportune arrival of Musgrave on the scene before Barton was sufficiently tired to be disposed of. Well, that he had to risk. If they caught him, his goose would be very successfully cooked, for there was no doubt that after that they would keep him fast in his rooms until the return of the doctor. Therefore he must not fail. He walked back to the house and called for Barton.

"Yes, sir, did you want me?" the man came hurrying into the hall.

"I want to know if you'll have a game of tennis with me?" he said. "I'm getting fed up doing nothing."

"Certainly, sir," was the reply. "I shall be very pleased to, I'll get the racquets."

While he was gone, Jack took his felt hat from the peg in the hall, and strolled down beyond the tennis courts and hid it in a bush that he would have to pass in his precipitate flight to the oak tree. He changed into a pair of brown tennis shoes; but kept on his ordinary clothes.

Then he retraced his steps and waited for Barton.

Much to his relief, with the appearance of Barton on the scene, armed with racquets and balls, Musgrave took himself off, and went back into the house.

So far his plan was maturing well. It rested now on how long he could get Barton to play, and then, on the exact time of the reappearance of Musgrave on the scene. There was certainly

a lot that had to be left to luck in this scheme of his, but he could not in the time think of a better one—it had to do.

They played steadily until half-past ten, then Barton cried off.

"We'll have to rest a bit, sir," he said.

"By all means," replied Jack, amiably. "Let's go to the house and have some refreshment and smokes, and then you must have your revenge. I beat you pretty badly then, Barton."

"I know, sir. I shall be glad of a drink. I suppose you wouldn't care to take Musgrave on, sir, he's not a bad player, and a good stayer."

"No thanks," grinned Jack. "You are more up to my style. I shall end by making a player of you, Barton, if I stay in this God-forsaken place long enough."

"It's not a bad hole, sir."

"It would be fine if I didn't want to get out of it," said Jack, as they strolled back to the house.

"That's true, sir," said the other. "There's a deal in that. I believe Parkhurst is quite a nice place, only the inmates don't seem to notice it—and the views all round Dartmoor are wonderful, but completely lost on the working gangs, sir."

"You've expressed the position admirably, Barton," said Jack with a laugh. "We'll rest for an hour," he added, "at least I shall; you do as you like, but come back in an hour,

anyway, and I'll give you your revenge. I mean to play till nearly one o'clock."

"Good Lord, sir, you'll tire yourself out," objected the man.

"Best thing to do under the circumstances," he retorted.

When the man had gone, he went up to his room and got some money. He had no weapon with him here, and reflected that on arriving in London, instead of going off to Golder's Green as he had thought, he would have to look in at his rooms in Lennox Street, sneak in like a thief, in fact, and try and get hold of his revolver without anyone there being the wiser. Rather difficult seeing that not only was Doctor Watman there, but Elise also, and young Jenkins. Well, Jenkins could be squared.

He loitered about for the rest of the hour, and then once more betook himself to the tennis court. Barton was there, waiting. They played. Gradually time moved on. As it grew nearer to the moment when he would have to make his attempt, he felt his heart beginning to beat uncomfortably. Such a lot depended on the time he had at his disposal between the going of Barton and the coming of Musgrave. With luck he might count on about seven minutes, at the worst five.

At last he glanced at his watch. It was a quarter to one—lunch was at half-past. As they finished the set he flung himself on the ground.

"I'm done in," he said. "And you look pretty well cooked, Barton. I vote we stop.

I'll stay here till luncheon is ready, you go in if you want to."

Barton, panting, and extremely hot, stood regarding him for a moment.

"Better come in, sir. It's a bit damp on that grass."

"All the better," said Jack, lying full length. "I'll cool off the sooner."

Again Barton hesitated. "You ought to have more sense, sir," he expostulated. "Better come in."

"Go to blazes, Barton, and tell them to push on with the grub. I'm hungry!" said Jack.

Then Barton did what Jack had not calculated on, he took a whistle from his pocket and blew it loudly.

"What's that for, the police?" he asked, getting up suddenly and putting on his coat.

"No, sir," said Barton, and without another word he walked off to the house.

Jack Denham, however, knew very well that it was for Musgrave. This would probably mean failure of all his plans. It meant that instead of seven minutes, he would have only two or three. He walked rapidly towards the bush under which he had hidden his hat, and with a glance back, he started to run in among the trees. That glance had been enough. He had seen Musgrave coming out of the hall window on to the terrace. It depended now, on how long it took him to climb that infernal tree, and how fast Musgrave could run. Jack himself was fleet as a hare. He did his best now, sprinting

down the path as though his very life depended on it. His liberty did, anyhow, and that was much the same thing to him.

He heard Musgrave's heavy footsteps behind. He must have seen him run, or worse still, that fellow Barton, as cute as a weasel, might have grown suspicious and hence the reason for his call to Musgrave. Anyhow, it didn't much matter which it was, the result was the same. Musgrave was after him and there were not more than a hundred and fifty yards between them, and he had that tree to negotiate.

He heard Musgrave shout to him to stop, but of course, paid no heed, and didn't look back, as he knew he would lose ground by doing so. He gained the tree at last, sprang at a branch, missed it and fell; cursing volubly he picked himself up, and tried again. This time he reached it, got a hold on the trunk with his shoes, and swung himself up. Then he looked back.

Musgrave running hard, was fifty yards away. Jack, his heart beating cruelly, crawled along the branch, seized another overhead and climbed higher. He was on a level now with the branch that was the goal he was aiming at, and Musgrave was twenty yards off. Now he was astride the big out-stretching arm, and as he squirmed along towards the wall, Musgrave was underneath him.

"Come down, sir," he panted angrily. "What the blazes are you trying to do?"

"What does it look like?" retorted Jack.

He was standing on the top of the wall now, holding on to the branch for support. It had held his weight, but that was all.

"You can't get down that way," cried Musgrave. "You'll hurt yourself with that drop on the other side."

"That's my affair," said Jack. "I'll take the risk anyhow."

With an oath Musgrave set off along the path towards the gate. Jack had feared that he might have done this before, which would be fatal for him, as he had to pass the gate on his way to the village. As it was, it was almost possible that the man might get there first. At any rate he had to take the chance. He let go of the branch, and trusting for luck and a soft fall, he dropped.

He fell on grass, and was shaken, but in no way hurt. So he picked himself up, seized his hat which had fallen off, and set out running across the field. If there were any obstacles, such as railings, he would be done. But there were none. So far luck was on his side. How long would it last, he wondered. He was nearing the gate—he heard sharp voices there, then a grating sound. As he passed he had a vision of the big iron gates swinging open and Musgrave's huge figure running out—he passed him by a yard. It was purely a matter now of speed, and Jack, the younger and lighter by a good bit, began to gain. He dared not look back, but he felt he was gaining. If only he could put fifty yards between himself and his pursuer

before he reached the hotel he might have time. But could he ? Also there was the grave question as to whether the cab would be ready. The man might think he was not coming. Then, too, and this was the worst possibility of all to be reckoned with : if Musgrave got up before they were off he would stop the man from going. Everyone in the place must know that Doctor Watman kept patients, and that attendants were there to look after them. The cab-driver would obey Musgrave before he would obey Jack Denham, and Jack knew it. He thought of all this as he ran, and it lent wings to his speed. Presently the village was in sight, and now the inn ; and before the inn door a cab was standing, the driver staring down the road along which the two men were running.

Jack, not knowing how long it took to get to the station, drew a bow at a venture. The odds were that he *was* pretty late and anyhow it was his only chance.

" Get onto the box ! " he shouted. " I may lose my train."

The man heard, ran to the front of the cab and climbed up. Jack, his breath coming in long gasping sobs, for he was almost exhausted, ran up, and for a moment stood holding on to the cab door.

" Get in, sir. You've run it too fine I'm afraid. I thought you wasn't coming." The cabman's voice was urgent. Jack, with a supreme effort jumped in and as he did so he

heard a shout from Musgrave not thirty yards away.

"Stop, man!" he called. "He's one of the doctor's patients, don't take him—he's mad!"

The man stared, then turned and looked at Jack.

"Go on, you damned fool," said Jack, his head out of the window. "It's a lie—I'm nothing of the sort. There'll be a pound for you, if you get to the station in time." He thrust a note into the man's face.

"I'm sorry, sir," he said. "I can't go agin Mr. Musgrave. I'll wait till he comes up." And he deliberately got down from his seat.

Jack thrust open the door and got out. This was the end of it, then, unless he did what, though hateful to him, was the only thing to do, and save the situation. Musgrave had been too much for him, he must therefore be one too many for the driver. He strode up to him, and at a well-delivered blow the man all unsuspecting doubled up, and fell sprawling on the ground. After all Musgrave had said he was mad. So he might as well act the part, and in any case the man was not hurt. As Jack sprang into the driving seat, Musgrave, panting and furious ran up. He was, however, a second too late, for Jack was off, as fast as the old horse could gallop. He had not the faintest notion as to where the station was, but as the cab had been facing that way, he supposed he was going in the right direction.

A little farther on, he met a car driving slowly; he pulled up, there was only the driver inside.

"Can you tell me the way to Treloar Station?" he asked.

"Straight on, about three miles," said the man. "Turn to your right at the top of the steep hill, you'll find it a stiff one to negotiate."

"Thanks," said Jack, and glanced at his watch. It was after one o'clock, and he knew there was not much speed to be got out of this old horse. The motorist, with a glance of faint curiosity at the man on the box, for he didn't look like the usual cab-driver, went on, and with his departure there occurred to the fugitive another horrible idea, which was that Musgrave, in his desperation, might stop the motorist and get him to follow on after the runaway. If so he would be fairly done, for the car was a high-powered machine and would simply walk over him. However, against this there was the fact that he had a bit of a start; then the man had to get to the inn first, and he was driving slowly. Also, he would have to be commandeered, and he might quite possibly refuse or only give in and agree after much hesitation and time would have been lost. Anything might happen.

Soon he found himself at the commencement of a steep hill and here an idea, or as he termed it when recounting the facts later to Elise, something in the nature of a brain-wave occurred to him. It would be far easier and quicker to ride up it than to try and urge the wretched

animal to drag the heavy cab after him, and certainly more humane, which was a decided consideration where Jack Denham was concerned. Quick as thought, he unharnessed the horse, having first drawn the cab across the road (he could picture Musgrave's and the motorist's faces and imagine the lurid language when they found it so), threw all the harness except the bridle inside, and sprang on to the animal's back.

He burst out laughing as he reflected upon the comical appearance he must present. The horse, a rawboned, long-maned, flowing tailed crock; its rider, a young man in immaculate blue serge coat, flannel trousers and tennis shoes, astride its bony, saddleless back, urging it on with fist and heels, and with desperately anxious face turned at each second over his shoulder to see if he were being followed.

Half-way up the hill he came upon an old man carrying a pack over his shoulder, who stared at him in a kind of terrified amaze.

"How far to the station?" shouted Jack, not daring to slacken speed for the answer. But there was no answer, for the old man only stared with his mouth open and stood where he was, gazing after him until he disappeared over the brow of the hill.

"If I look as odd as that," reflected Jack, "perhaps they'll guess at the station where I come from and detain me. Come on, old man, get a move on. I'm sorry to force the pace but needs must when Musgrave follows on."

Then taking the motorist's advice, he turned down a road to the right and rode on as fast as the old horse could go. It was a fairly straight and good road, and many times he looked back to see if he was being followed. No one was in sight yet, anyhow. Surely he must have gone half the distance. His impatience was getting the better of him, and again he glanced at his watch. It was twenty minutes past one and the train left in ten minutes. Not a milestone had he passed, but away in the distance he saw telegraph poles, then the roofs of many houses and, very far off he heard the shrill whistle of an engine.

Once more he glanced over his shoulder; this time there was a solitary cyclist on the road, pedalling hard and palpably gaining on him. He knew instinctively that it was Musgrave. So the motorist had jibbed, if, that is, he had ever been asked at all. He urged the old horse on, and came to a hill up which he knew Musgrave would have to walk. So he urged the steed into a gallop, turned a sharp corner at the summit, and, with his heart in his mouth, for the animal's forelegs were nothing to boast about, took the incline at a canter and clattered into the town.

It was market day and the main street was crowded. Jack, aware that inquiring eyes were upon him, picked his way skilfully between carts and pedestrians.

"Going to win the Grand National, mister?" asked a wit among the crowd.

"Probably," replied Jack, "if you give the animal a chance and take your face out of the way. My horse shies at things like that, and I'm in a hurry." The crowd laughed and he thrust his way through. Came to a corner where another street crossed and where a policeman was regulating the traffic.

"Which way to the station, constable?" he asked. The man turned and looked at him. It was a comprehensive stare in which no detail was lost.

"Police station?" he asked. "I can take you there if you like."

"No," said Jack, grinning. "Railway." And then, seeing an empty taxi waiting outside an inn on the opposite side of the street, he put up his hand and the driver nodded. Jack sprang off the horse and led it up to the constable.

"Hang on to this, old man, for a minute. It won't bite or bolt, whatever it may look like," and, flinging the reins over the constable's head, he dashed across the road and held out a ten-shilling note to the taxi-driver. "This is yours if you get me to the station in time to catch the London express," he said, and sprang in. As the driver started the engine, Jack put his head out and shouted to the enraged but impotent constable.

"It belongs to the pub at Treloar. Tell 'em to give it an extra feed of corn and a bottle of brandy, and charge it to my account. They'll know who I am."

"I should think they would," growled the policeman, eyeing the animal he held with anger and distrust. And then he saw Musgrave, one of the keepers at Treloar Hall whom he knew, coming along on his bicycle, and called out to him.

"Here! What am I to do with this?"

"How the devil should I know?" retorted Musgrave, very flushed and as angry as the policeman. "You took charge of it so I suppose you are responsible. Where's his rider?"

"Taxied to the station," was the reply. "Know him?"

"Comes from our place," snapped Musgrave as he rode on.

"You surprise me," said the constable, with cutting sarcasm. "Pity you don't learn to look after 'em better." But Musgrave was out of earshot, and a Treloar farmer arriving on the scene, the constable proceeded to make arrangements concerning his unwelcome charge.

In the meantime Jack had reached the station, sprung out of the taxi and handed the note to the driver.

"Thanks, old fellow, I'll remember you in my will."

The train was in, he saw that it was on the verge of departure, and Musgrave was twenty yards behind. Could he do it? He ran through the booking office on to the platform; there was no time for a ticket, already the train was moving out. He sprinted across the

platform and barged into a porter, sending him sprawling.

"Sorry, old bean," he said as he seized the handle of a carriage door, "I had to catch this train or die."

"Pity you didn't die then," growled the man, picking himself up. The guard shouted at him, but he was in and the door shut, and, putting his head out of the window he saw Musgrave running towards him, panting and furious. Jack waved his hand.

"Sorry, Musgrave," he called, "I had to do it. Give this to the cabby at Treloar, he deserves it," and screwing a pound note into a ball, he flung it out at Musgrave's feet.

Jack Denham sat back in his seat and chuckled. It had been a thrilling escapade while it lasted, and now that it was over and he had time to think, he remembered that he had had no midday meal and realised that he was uncommonly hungry, and that there was another occupant of the carriage, a well-dressed woman who was regarding him in evident perplexity and distrust. First her eyes ranged about his face which was flushed and decidedly heated, then they travelled to his immaculate lounge coat which, together with flannel trousers, was hardly appropriate for a rather chilly day in October. She, herself wore a fur coat and was grateful for it. Finally her eyes rested on a pair of well-worn tennis shoes. They stopped there, and Jack began to feel uncomfortable. If she had smiled, all would have been

well, but she didn't, and Jack reflected that she didn't look like a woman who would find it easy to smile at anything. He liked people who smiled easily, especially women. He, therefore, wanted to get away from this one who didn't and who stared stonily at him instead. He turned to her.

"Excuse me," he said, "but would you mind telling me if one can get lunch on this train?"

Her eyes left his shoes and soared to his face.

"I believe so," she said in a frosty voice.

"Thanks, awfully," replied Jack. "I'll barge in and see if I can get some grub." He stood up, arranged his tie before the glass and smoothed his hair. He had noticed in his mad rush along the platform that the train seemed pretty full, and he did not look forward with any pleasure to a journey of several hours spent in the company of this unsmiling and frosty lady. And so, the demon of mischief entering into him, with his wish for a carriage to himself, he said, casually:

"You know, I'm running away from a private luny asylum, that accounts for my rig," and then, genially: "I only just managed it, and left the keeper dancing with rage on the platform. Wasn't it a lark?"

"Oh!" said the lady, and the frost had given place to fear. As Jack passed out into the corridor she drew herself well back into the corner, and when. after a good lunch he returned

to find the carriage empty, it was only what he had expected.

"Thank the Lord," he said, and, stretching to his full length on the seat, he slept comfortably and peacefully until the train drew up into Reading Station. Instantly he was wide awake. The odds were that Musgrave would have wired or 'phoned to Doctor Watman, and there was the chance that someone would be waiting for him at Paddington. This was an unexpected opportunity as he did not expect the train to stop before the terminus. He reached for his hat and was making for the door when it was flung open and the guard waved a hand.

"He's in there, sir," and in stepped Inspector Harper.

"I might have guessed that," said Jack, in utter disgust.

"So you might," retorted Harper, sitting down opposite him, "and spared yourself a long journey and me all this unnecessary trouble. It's true I happened to be in Reading on a job when the message came, but I had to have the express stopped."

"Butting in on my private concerns isn't your job anyway," said Jack sourly.

"Well," retorted the other, ignoring the remark, "are you going to give me any more trouble, or——" He put his hand into his pocket.

"What's the grizzly alternative?" asked Jack.

"These," said Harper, holding up a pair of handcuffs. Jack burst out laughing.

"You wouldn't dare," he said.

"I'd dare anything in the execution of my duty," was the reply.

"That's just the point I raised and you ignored. I claim that it's not your duty."

"All part and parcel of the same thing. I'm told off to round up those fellows—what's left of them—out at Golder's Green, and incidentally to keep you out of it. Well, what's it to be? You haven't answered my question yet."

"Oh, all right, put 'em away, Harper, and don't make a bigger damn fool of yourself than you can help."

Harper, grinning, complied with the first part of the request, and commented on the last: "You can give me points there, Mr. Denham," he said.

"All this infernal fuss," growled Jack, "when I have only come up to see Eddy and Mrs. Allwood. I was going to Lennox Street, you priceless idiot."

"Yes, via Golder's Green. I know." But Jack had spoken the truth. He had meant to go to Lennox Street that night at any rate. He had left his revolver there for one thing. It was Inspector Harper who, most unwittingly, sent him to Golder's Green that night, and was the innocent cause of all the ensuing trouble. Jack resigned himself to the inevitable.

"Did Musgrave tell the guard?" he asked.

"Yes, told him to keep an eye on you, and look out for me when the train stopped here. What on earth else did you expect?"

"Well, I didn't reckon on Musgrave being so brainy. What are you going to do with me, Harper?"

"Oh, just run you along to Lennox Street," was the reply. "They're expecting you." And then, after a pause, "What game do you reckon to be playing, Mr. Denham?"

"I was going out to Golder's Green to-morrow, damn you," he replied.

"I thought so; well, I'm afraid you won't get there. You will spend the night in your rooms and the first thing in the morning you'll be escorted by one of my men back to Treloar. And I don't think you'll find it so easy to do another getaway. Golder's Green is my affair."

"Have you spotted the house yet?"

"No, but all the roads are watched," was the reply, "and if Sullivan is thinking it wise to make a move, he'll fall into our arms."

"I can find the way to that house," said Jack. After all it was only a matter of finding out where Mr. Brandscome lived. "I want a pot shot at dear old Jim. Will you let the girl Molly go if I take you there?"

"When I take them, I bag the lot, male and female," replied Harper dryly. "Sentiment plays no part in my profession."

"I always thought you were an ass," said

Jack in disgust. "I won't raise a finger to help you if you hurt that girl."

"We can manage without your help," retorted Harper. "And to let you into a little secret, we are going to try and get on to them to-night."

"Then you do know where the house is?" demanded Jack.

"That's telling," was the retort.

For the rest of the journey Jack was very silent. This had altered things considerably, and it meant that he must warn Molly. Given an opportunity, and it should be easy seeing that Eddy was confined to his bed and Elise busily occupied with him, he would discover the telephone number of Brandscome's house, ring up, and if Molly replied he would warn her, and if she was alone, go off himself and help to get her away. That settled in his mind, he entered into a lengthy conversation about nothing to the rather surly and extremely bored detective, who was thankful when the train drew up at Paddington. Harper took Jack by the arm.

"No tricks," he said, and they got out on to the platform. As they walked along another man came up and joined them, walking on Jack's other side. They passed a well-dressed, fur-clad woman who stared hard at Jack, and he grinned, as he thought of the thrilling story she would tell of her journey with an escaped lunatic who had obviously been taken on landing at Paddington.

" What's the joke ? " asked Harper, and when Jack told him, he smiled and shrugged his shoulders.

" It's about time you were shut up or married," was his comment.

" Do you reckon then, that detention and marriage come under the same heading ? "

" You want some sensible woman to look after you," was the retort. " though I admit I pity the lady. Here's the car, so get in and let's get through with this, my time's valuable."

" I didn't ask you to waste it on me," snapped Jack as he entered the police car.

Neither of them noticed a woman pass by as they drew up outside the house in Lennox Street, nor that she looked very hard at them and then walked more quickly down the street.

Harper followed Jack upstairs into the sitting-room where Doctor Watman and Elise were seated.

" Here he is," said the detective gruffly, " so I'll hand him over to you. A man will call for him in the morning and they'll take the midday train back to Treloar, unless I succeed in my job to-night, when there won't be any necessity. But I may fail, so if he gives any more trouble, ring me up and I'll take him round to the station and lock him up." He grinned, saluted and went.

" I came up to see Eddy," said Jack, " and was met by an escort. How is he ? " And going up to Elise, he put his arms round her and kissed

her on the lips. "You perfect wonder," he said.

"And you perfect idiot," she retorted. The doctor smiled.

"Your brother is better," he replied gravely. "It is chiefly exhaustion, and a few days in bed with rest and quiet and freedom from anxiety," here he looked steadily at the young man who had the grace to wince, "will put him on his legs again. Elise is looking after him and I think I can safely leave you also in her hands. I won't say anything about your escapade because I should have done the same had I been you." Here the old man turned and smiled at Elise. "You will, of course, reap the reward of all the trouble you have given us when you return to-morrow. I have written Musgrave instructions."

"Oh, Lord!" said Jack.

As the door closed behind Doctor Watman, Elise turned and put her hands on her lover's shoulders."

"You are a perfect disgrace," she said.

"Then the sooner you marry me the better," was the reply. "Harper says I ought either to be shut up or married. Which is it to be?"

"Apparently it's going to be both," she said. "And quite soon," she added with a blush, and kissed him.

CHAPTER X

MOLLY MAKES GOOD

"HE'S here!" The stout woman burst open the door in Jim Sullivan's living-room and tossed her furs on to the table.

"Who's here, Liz?" asked the big man, putting the glass from which he had been drinking, down beside him.

"Mr. Jack Denham," was the reply. "I saw him and that fool Harper both go into the house in Lennox Street as I was passing. It was just luck for I hadn't been watching."

"And it's about time we had some luck too," replied the man sourly. "We've been cursed ever since we set eyes on that fellow Denham. But you needn't call Harper a fool, my gal. He's very far from being that. He's getting on to us and it's about time we cleared out, if we aren't too late already."

At that moment Molly, followed by Mike and Appleton, came into the room. The girl's face was white and woebegone, she sat down listlessly and glanced furtively and with a look of fear in her eyes at Sullivan.

"Your paramour, Jack Denham, is back

in Lennox Street my girl," he said, looking at her with narrowed eyes.

She sat forward with a start, and the colour flooded her cheeks. "He can't be," she said, "I thought you said he was in a nursing home."

"*I* didn't say so," he growled, "I told you that damned brother of his said so. But you know more about it than I do, and one of these days I'll get the truth out of you as to what really happened. That Boy Scout story never did cut any ice with me."

"That was poor old Bob's theory," put in Mike, pulling at an evil smelling pipe. "It was him that swore he saw him the day he got back from Normanton Hall."

"And so he did, for I saw him myself, as I have told you before," added Appleton. "Geoffrey Chadbrook it was, the same that came barging in to old Grundtstein's studio that night and got Denham away from us. You can bet your life that a sharp fellow like that followed us up and spotted the house, otherwise as I've said all along, how came that woman here after Captain Denham? How did she know where to come?"

Jim Sullivan looked across at Molly and smiled; it was a particularly repulsive smile, and one that she knew well. Her trembling hands suddenly clutched at her chair.

"Geoffrey Chadbrook," repeated Sullivan, slowly, while his voice took on a harsh jarring note. "Geoffrey Chadbrook—nothing!

There's only one person who could have given us away, and that's a woman. A woman," he repeated, "who's going to get what's coming to her, and that very soon. If I hadn't been forced to hide from the cursed police as I have done, she'd have got it before this. Now, Molly, my gal," his voice was a sudden bark, "out with it."

"It's a lie," cried the girl, desperately, "I never gave you away, I wouldn't be such a fool. I don't want to be taken, and if they take you they'll take me."

"Will they?" retorted Sullivan. "Then why haven't they come and done it by now? I'll tell you why," he leant forward and tapped his knee with every word. "Because you made a bargain that if you helped to free the captain, they must swear not to give us away to the police. Otherwise, why haven't the police been here before? Tell me that. They're round here looking for us because what old Bob said was true; that Chadbrook boy *did* trace him as far as Golder's Green Station, but no farther. That's why the police aren't sure. If they were, they'd be here now."

"They've been three times," put in Lizzie, with a chuckle. "But only found a toothless old caretaker, and had to clear off with their tails between their legs. It's a pity I never went on the stage, I'd have made a pile."

"You'll make a bigger one if you stick to me," said Sullivan. "I see now where I've been a fool, but if we get clear out of this

and can start fresh, I'll see I don't repeat my mistake." Suddenly he rose, strode across to where Molly was seated, huddled miserably in a chair, and caught hold of her wrist. "Now then," he snarled. "We're going to have the truth."

"I've told you the truth, Jim. I never——" He struck her across the mouth with the back of his hand.

"Steady, man, steady," muttered Mike frowning.

"You mind your own damned business." Sullivan glared at him malevolently and the other shrugged and turned away.

"Now," went on Sullivan, towering over the cowering girl, "I'll have the truth, and the sooner you tell it the better for you. Was it you who gave this place away, or was it young Chadbrook who found it out? Better answer, I'll get it in the end." He gave her wrist a savage twist, and she screamed piteously.

"Oh, Jim! Don't hurt me," she cried.

"I haven't begun to hurt you yet," he retorted. "When I do you'll know it. Now once more, answer; was it you or the Scout?"

A moment's silence, a sudden movement from Jim Sullivan, and Molly was writhing on the floor, screaming in agony.

"Don't, don't! Oh, Jim, I'll tell!—I'll —let go! Mike! Stop him. I can't—can't ——" Her voice sank to a low moan; Lizzie

put her hands to her ears, and Mike sprang to his feet.

"Stop that, Sullivan, or by God, I'll—I'll ——"

"You'll what?" asked the other turning as he flung the girl from him. "You'll sit down, you fool, and you'll hold your tongue or I'll let daylight into you." He glared at the man, who met his eyes for a moment, and then once more, with a shrug, dropped into his seat.

"Now, out with it," said Sullivan, turning on the sobbing girl, "or you'll get another dose." He bent down and stretched out a hand.

"No, no!" she screamed. "Not again! I'll tell you. I—'phoned to him, to Jack—he couldn't come—he—he sent that woman—the one I told you about, and she got his brother away."

There was a whistle from Appleton, and a sardonic laugh from Lizzie.

"You always were a fool over a pretty face, Jim," she sneered, "and now you see what you get."

"Hold your damned tongue," he snapped, and then once more turning to the girl. "So Jack Denham knows, and that woman knows. Then why haven't the police been on to us by now?"

"They promised not to give us away," she said, weakly.

"Promised! Hell!" he retorted. "And already he's killed two of my men, and for

all we know he was a party to the killing of Bob Vincent. And you trust his promise! You risk our lives, our liberties, on the word of that man?"

"Oh, yes, yes!" she cried. "Can't you see? He's kept his word, or the police would have been here. You *can* trust him. If I hadn't known that, do you think I would have told him anything? I know. Oh, I know, he wouldn't let them take me."

"Take *you!*" the words were like a whip lash. "Who in hell cares what happens to you? If we get away from here, I'll see you pay for your treachery for the rest of your natural. Curse you!" He raised one foot and Molly cowered back. But at that Appleton interfered.

"Stop, Jim," he said quietly. "This has given me an idea." He came a step forward and put himself between Sullivan and the girl who scrambled to her feet and backed into a corner of the room, her face distorted with fear.

"Well, what's the bright idea?" demanded Sullivan, angrily.

"Sit down and leave the girl alone, and I'll tell you," was the reply. "The mischief's done now, you won't help matters by rough handling her. She's had some of her medicine and the rest will come later, when we get hold of that fellow Denham."

"As how?" demanded Sullivan, but he sat down.

"I'll tell you. Lizzie saw him a little while back with Harper. Well, we know now that he couldn't come to his brother's rescue, which meant he was detained somewhere, probably in the nursing home the brother mentioned. And now he's here in London. What does that mean?"

"Search me," sneered Sullivan.

"Harper had him by the arm," volunteered Lizzie.

"Exactly," said Appleton. "Denham had got away and was probably caught by the 'tec on his arrival here. But why had he come?"

"Once more you can search me," said Sullivan, disagreeably.

"Well, it's my belief he came to warn our Moll that Harper was on our tracks. He'd know that while he was shut up Harper would do his damnedest to round us up, so he made a getaway, only bungled it, as he would. He's probably staying at his rooms for the night and will likely be bundled back to the nursing home in the morning. Well, now's our chance to get him, don't you see?"

"'Fraid I don't," retorted Sullivan. "My brain never was equal to yours, Alec."

"I see," exclaimed Lizzie. "He means for Moll to ring him up on the 'phone and ask him to come and help get her away. That's the game, ain't it, Alec?" Sullivan sprang to his feet.

"By God!" he said. "It's the goods!"

Then, after a pause, "There's only one thing strikes me about it, which is, that if he's here to warn the girl he'll probably ring up on his own account."

"More than likely," Appleton agreed, and glanced at the clock. "Nearly nine. If he doesn't do it soon we shall have to call upon our Moll."

"You don't suppose," said the girl, suddenly grown very quiet and calm, "that I'd do that, do you?"

"I think you will," retorted Sullivan, grimly.

"Never," she said. "Never! You can kill me, but I won't do that."

"You didn't seem to like being hurt a minute ago," sneered the big man. "Well, that's nothing to what you *will* get my girl."

"I'll stand anything you like to do to me," she replied, fiercely; "but I won't bring Jack here to be butchered, and that's flat. You can torture or do what you like to me, Jim Sullivan; but I won't be the means of getting that boy here for you to kill." She stared at him, defiance in her eyes. Whereupon he strode across to her, struck her across the face, and called her by a foul name.

"Steady, Jim," said Mike. "No more of that."

"Look here," put in the stout woman. "Never mind about the girl, she's more trouble than she's worth. My voice is fairly like hers and, anyway, I can imitate it well enough

to pass across the 'phone. I'll do the speaking and get him here, you trust me."

"Good idea," said Appleton. "Give him till nine o'clock, and if there's no sign of him by then Liz had better ring him up and put a tale across the line about Moll and her troubles, that'll fetch him."

"And if you'll take my tip," put in Mike, who had been a silent and frowning listener, "you'll can the Denham stunt and get out while there's good going."

Sullivan looked at the speaker contemptuously.

"If you're suffering from cold feet you can get out right now," he said, coldly. "This is my one great chance. You others have systematically bungled all your chances as they came along, so now it's left to me, and when I've got that Denham fixed I'll go and not before," and, turning his back to the others, he sat there with his eyes on the clock.

Only once until the telephone bell rang was the silence broken, and that by Molly who, as she realised what the inevitable end of this must be, went over to Jim Sullivan and dropped on her knees beside him.

"Jim, don't do this. Don't! It's murder. Jim, listen to me——" But breaking in on her agonised entreaty, there came the sharp ring of the looked for bell, and she screamed.

"Get hold of that girl, Alec, and shut her mouth," cried Sullivan. Lizzie ran to the

'phone, and Appleton, taking up a small table cover, flung it over the girl's head and held it.

The voice speaking at the telephone was remarkably like Molly's, so like that Jim Sullivan smiled broadly, as he listened.

"Yes, who is speaking? Oh, Jack, why are you here? What is it? In danger do you say? To-night? Oh, please come and help me. I'm all alone. They're out, yes, won't be in for hours. You can help me get away before they come back. You will? Oh, you are brave. Yes, I have a friend in Yorkshire, I'll go there. Yes, yes, I'll leave the kitchen window open, only look out for the dog. Jim leaves him loose in the garden, and I daren't go outside. Yes, I'll be ready." She put down the receiver and turned to the others.

"He's coming," she said, "in his own car. Should be here in about half an hour. Better turn all lights out and shut the dog up."

"That's it," agreed Sullivan, with a grin. "You, Alec, and I will stand on each side of this door. When he comes in, grab him and take his gun."

Appleton nodded and uncovered the girl's head.

"Oh, you vile, wicked beasts!" she cried, panting and half smothered.

"Shut your mouth, fool! You'll do no good by that," growled Sullivan. "I tell you what," he went on savagely, turning to the others.

" I'm sick of all this, and I'm going to leave that girl here for the police to take when they come. She can stay down in the cellar and keep her dead lover company."

" Isn't that going a bit too far ? " objected Mike.

" Say another word and I'll leave you there too," snarled Sullivan. They waited. Only the ticking of the clock, and once a strangled sob from Molly broke the dead silence of that room.

And then, as Sullivan rose and turned out the lights, Mike suddenly spoke.

" Funny if Harper turned up instead of Denham," he said.

" Stow it, you fool ! " retorted Lizzie, who had started at the suggestion. " Frightening us all for nothing. It was Denham who spoke to me over the 'phone, I know his voice."

" Well, keep that girl quiet, Liz," said Sullivan, " or she'll try and warn him."

" Right you are." Not a sound ; if Jack Denham had come he had come very quietly. Ten more minutes passed, and then there came a faint noise from somewhere in the house, a footstep, a hand feeling the door, and then a voice out in the passage.

" Molly ! "

" Here," answered Lizzie softly, ramming her hand over the girl's mouth. The handle of the door turned. A flash of light struck across the room. The next instant there was the sound of a struggle, a man's voice cursing.

The flashlight was dropped with a crash on the ground, and Jim Sullivan called out.

"Got him! Turn on the light." There was a click, and there, held firmly between the two men, with his back against the wall, was Jack Denham. He had ceased to struggle, knowing the futility of it, and turning his head, glanced round the room. Molly was standing, wide-eyed, white-faced, staring at him. He smiled.

"So that's that," he said.

The two men dragged him further into the room, and Sullivan took his revolver and flung it on the table.

"Got you this time, Mr. Jack Denham," he said with a chuckle.

"It rather looks like it, don't it, my one and only Jim. And our Molly the decoy once more. Oh, what a game."

"I didn't——" began the girl, but Jack interrupted her.

"Quite an exciting drama of real and true life entitled 'Face to Face at Last' or 'The Villain's Revenge'. Wonderful! Mr. Appleton, you are hurting my arm, which isn't done. In the Best Circles, the helpless prisoner is never hurt."

"Indeed, it was not I, boy——" cried Molly, but this time Sullivan interrupted her with an oath.

"Shut your mouth, you——!"

"Tut, tut, Jim. That's beastly rude," said Jack. "I'm not used to that sort of language."

"I think it's only right and fair to tell you," broke in Mike, "that the girl didn't speak to you over the 'phone. It was Liz who imitated her voice."

"Thanks Mike, you're a stout fellow," said Jack. "I'll put in a good word for you to Harper when he comes."

"You'll be cold mutton long before that," sneered Sullivan.

"No, no," said Jack. "Pork, my dear fellow, pork. At least that's what I understand we resemble most when defunct and cooked. His Satanic Majesty will get quite a good cut off the joint when you go down, Jim, or will he prefer pie?"

"Very funny, Mr. Denham," growled the other. "But I rather fancy I've got something in store for you that will alter your tone a bit."

"All right, old man, then don't keep me standing here too long, I'm tired," he yawned.

"Bring him along, Alec. The sooner we start the more time I shall have for enjoying myself. I don't want to have to kill him off too soon."

"What? Is it the little torture chamber at last?" asked Jack, as he was dragged towards the trap-door.

"Oh, Jim! Don't do it, Jim!" cried Molly, desperately.

"Keep her quiet, Liz. When we're ready she can come down and look at him."

"Don't bother about me, old girl," called

out Jack. "You're true steel. I'll kill Harper if he touches you." And then he found himself stumbling down wooden steps into darkness. Someone brought down a lamp, and he saw it was Mike.

"You in this too, Mike?" he said. "I thought better of you." The man didn't answer, and Jack looked round.

"I fail to observe the usual perquisites that go to complete the furnishing of this especial department," he said, in a disappointed tone of voice. "Haven't you even got a rack, my one and only Jim? I'm sure they've got one at the Tower, and Alf, before he joined the Saints, could easily have pinched it for you."

"I've got something that will do just as well," was the reply, "something of my own invention. Take off his coat, waistcoat and collar, Alec."

"Do you mean it's really something you thought out all by your little self?" asked Jack, as Appleton tore his jacket off. "Then, by Jove! I should think it's likely to put rack, boot, and all the other pleasant little things right in the shade. Alec Appleton," he went on, sternly, "don't be so rough, this is my best suit and you'll pull it out of shape."

"Come on over here," said Jim Sullivan, taking one arm, while Appleton took the other.

"Never!" said Jack, suddenly struggling hard.

" What's the use ? " said Appleton. " You'll want all the breath you can save later on." They practically carried him across the room, and pushed him with his back against the wall.

" Now off with his boots, and then the collar first, that will settle him," said Sullivan. " Up on your toes, man, or you'll choke." They forced him up and fastened the broad leather with its jagged edges round his throat. He choked, cursed, and stood up on tiptoe to their fullest extent, which he well knew would mean intolerable agony to his muscles in a very short time, and yet if he should try to relieve the strain, not only would there be the danger of choking, but the rough edges of the stiff leather would cut into his neck. Then wrists were made fast to rings in the wall.

" I can't stand like this for long, you cowardly brute," he said.

" You'll stand like it for as long as you want to live," was the retort. Then Sullivan drew a broad leather strap round his chest and buckled it. But it did not help to relieve the strain on his ankles, for the chain that held it to the wall was three inches long.

" You'll break my ribs, damn you," said Jack.

" I think not," was the reply, and another strap went round his waist.

" Don't cut him in two quite," said Appleton, as Sullivan buckled it.

" I know what I'm doing," was the reply.

"Well, is that nice and comfy?" he went on, turning to his victim. "My turn for the witty repartee, I think. Don't feel so like it now, do you?"

"How — long — do — you — suppose — I'll — last — like — this—?" asked Jack, drawing his breath in quick short gasps. Already the strain on the muscles of his legs was torture. His face went suddenly white, and beads of perspiration started out on his forehead. He turned his aching neck, scratching the flesh on the jagged edges of the leather, and looked at Mike.

"Put—a—bullet—into—me—" he said.

"I've a good mind to," was the reply. "This is a bit more than *I* can stomach, Jim."

"Then get out of it," was the reply, and Mike looked into the muzzle of a revolver. With a shrug, he went up the wooden stairs.

"Didn't know it would be quite as bad as that, did you?" said Sullivan, grinning, and he sat down on a chair and regarded his victim complacently. It was not a pleasant sight, and after five minutes of it, Appleton, who had never liked the idea from the first, put his thoughts and feelings into a few choice and forceful sentences.

"Well," retorted Sullivan, "you know the remedy," he pointed to the wooden stairs.

"If he dies we shall all hang for murder," growled Appleton.

"He's going to die," was the reply. "But you are wrong about the hanging. "We get

away to-night. Grundtstein's little boat is ready and waiting with Grundtstein himself on board, and our future spiritual home lies in Germany. There are only four of us left, it's true, but we're worth saving. Ah well, if you must tear yourself away, bring me down a drink. This fellow's contortions is making me thirsty."

He sat there for half an hour, sipping his drink and watching the tortured man, in a kind of silent ecstasy. Neither spoke; Sullivan, because he knew that abusive words would be thrown away on a man who was almost beyond hearing them; Jack Denham, because all his energy was concentrated on keeping alive until Harper came and words would but waste his hardly fought for breath.

At length Sullivan rose and went to the ladder. At the foot he paused and looked back.

"I'm now going to have a look round," he said, "and if the coast is clear I shall have an hour or two's sleep. But before we go I promise you I'll come down and put you out of your misery."

"You're—not—worth—cursing," said Jack, at last, and Sullivan laughed and went up the ladder.

"My God!" groaned Jack Denham, and wondered how long he could stand it. Would Harper never come? What had happened to prevent him? Perhaps he had failed in his search, or perhaps after all he would not try

to-night . . . might have other duties, anything might have happened. His thoughts ran riot. Would Elise wait up for him? He had told her he was going to a night club and would be back late. She had believed him too, for, though she had tried to conceal her chagrin, she had not succeeded. Would she sit up for him? And if he didn't come would she guess where he had really gone and send for Harper? But if Harper couldn't come! God, what a thought! Perhaps Molly could help him. But no, not this time. Years of agony, or could it only be hours, passed? The lamp was still burning on the table, but very dim now, and even as he watched it, it flickered and went out. There was no sound above, no ease for his tortured muscles, aching neck, and bruised body. A deadly nausea overcame him, and he knew that if he collapsed now he would strangle, and there was no one to help him.

"Oh, Molly, Molly!" he groaned.

"Hush!" said a voice overhead. "I'm coming." Steps came down the ladder, sounding far off and muffled. It could not have been Molly really; it was a dream, an hallucination. . . . A faint light flashed across him, and he heard a strangled cry.

"Oh! Those devils!" And someone was tugging at the straps round his body.

"Collar—first—" he gasped. Then hands were at his neck. Deep, hissing breaths sounded in his ear as the tiny fingers tore at the three

buckles. At last, with a groan, his head fell forward, and his heels went down upon the floor. A dull droning sounded in his ears, perspiration fell in drops upon his shirt. Once more fingers were at the buckle that was gnawing a hole in his ribs, or so it seemed to him, and then there came a blinding flash of light, and above the droning in his ears he heard the sound of Jim Sullivan's voice from the trap-door above.

"At your tricks again, are you?" With an effort Jack raised his head and was aware of a figure kneeling in the opening. Heard someone calling in the distance: "Jim! Jim Sullivan! Come quick!"

"Go to hell!" was the reply, the voice was that of a man fuddled with drink, and he raised a heavy revolver.

"Get out of range, Molly," cried Jack, desperately. "He's going to shoot!" But Molly never moved, and as a shot rang out she gave a strangled cry and fell forward against Jack's helpless body. Someone dragged Sullivan away, and Molly sank down upon the floor.

"Oh, Molly, Molly!" groaned Jack. "You're hurt, and I can't help you. And it was for me, you dear, brave soul! Oh, God! If I could only help you!" He tore and strained at the lashings that held his wrists until the blood came, but without avail.

Molly raised herself on her hands and looked up at him. By the light of the torch which

still glowed on the table where she had placed it, he saw that her face was ashen.

"I—think—I'm—dying," she muttered.

"And for me!" He groaned, and bent forward as far as his bonds would let him, to see her face. Molly tried to smile, and then, with a supreme effort, and thinking only of him, she dragged herself to her knees. Jack felt clawing fingers at his legs, then at the strap about his waist.

"I can't," she said. "I've no strength—and—I wanted to set you free—before—I go. You're—in pain."

"Oh, never mind about me," he cried, bitterly. "Molly, girl, if you can—your lips ——" He strained forward, the clawing hands were about his body, chest, then his shoulders. The grey drawn face was close to his at last. The clutching hands were round his neck, he bent his head and, once more, as when he lay helpless in that house in Chelsea, her lips were pressed to his. Only then they had been warm, now there was the icy touch of death upon them.

"I—love—you—, boy." The cold hands relaxed their grip. She fell in a crumpled heap at his feet.

* * * * * * * *

Elise Allwood glanced at the clock. It was after twelve, and she wondered how much longer Jack would be. Of course he deserved a bit of fun after being cooped up in that

garden all these weeks—but still . . . he might perhaps have stayed with her that night. . . . No, that was merely selfish, and she was being a cat, a species of female that she particularly loathed. Of course, he wanted a spree; he was to go back the next day, and naturally he must have a fling and it was not likely he would get another chance for some time, unless, of course, Harper was successful to-night. But if not, well, it meant Treloar again, and—perhaps their honeymoon there; she wanted it there, she loved the place. There, for the first time for years she had been happy, and there she had met Jack; and in the meantime she was very tired and wished the young reprobate would come back.

She lay back in her chair, and closed her eyes. Dancing, she supposed, a harmless amusement—but, still——.

She awoke with a start, and saw that it was nearly two o'clock and no sign of Jack. She got quickly to her feet. What had happened? Surely he would not stay up as late as that, knowing that his return would probably wake Eddy? Of course not; then what did it mean? *Had* he gone to a night club or——. A horrible idea suddenly occurred to her. Had he, after all not gone to a club at all, and was his journey up here not for the object of ascertaining how his brother was, and seeing her? If so, there was only one other motive that would bring him; a visit to Golder's Green. She remembered now, that she thought she had heard

him speaking down the telephone, and yet it might have been to young Jenkins, but she had only heard Jack's voice. What should she do? Mrs. Jenkins was asleep on the sofa in her room in case she should be wanted; Jenkins upstairs. It was of no use to wake them, the old woman would only lose her head and be worse than useless; her son was, she thought, of not much use in an emergency. Harper was her only hope; but then Harper had said he was going to Golder's Green. If he had gone and been successful in his quest, then she had nothing to fear as regards Jack. But if he had not gone. . . . She ran to the 'phone in a panic, and rang up Scotland Yard.

"Is Inspector Harper there?" she asked. He was not, but was expected in at any moment. No, he had not gone after that especial gang; had been put on to something special and urgent. Yes, he should be told at once and sent round.

"And tell him to bring some men with him," said Elise. "Tell him Mr. Denham went out just after nine, and isn't home yet, say I'm terribly anxious."

For twenty minutes she paced up and down the sitting-room, a prey to torturing anxiety. Why had she been such a fool as to let him go? She could have stopped him, told him Eddy was worse than he really was. Anything she had said would have kept him there. And now, what had happened? He might be

caught by those devils, he might even be dead now.

"Oh!" she cried, in an agony of fear. "Not that! Not that! I can't lose him!" And then she heard a car stop at the door, and flew downstairs to open it. A tall figure brushed past her.

"What's the trouble now?" asked Inspector Harper.

"Jack went out at nine and hasn't returned," she began.

"Well, if you let him go out you mustn't be surprised," was the unsympathetic retort. "Didn't say where, I suppose? But if he had it wouldn't be the right address. I couldn't get there myself, special job on, so promised myself the treat to-morrow. However, we'll anticipate it by twenty-four hours. Do you know if anyone rang Mr. Denham up, or if he used the 'phone at all?"

"No one rang him up," she replied. "But I thought I heard him talking to someone once, just before he went out."

"I see," was the reply. "I'll ring up and get Exchange to tell me where the call was to." She followed him upstairs, and listened breathlessly to the one-sided conversation. At last he turned to her.

"It's as we thought," he said, sharply. "He rang up Brandscome's house, Golder's Green, the place we raided the other night, and found an innocent old woman sole occupant; but we were going again, of course."

"In any case, I would have told you now," said Elise; "and I'm coming with you," she added, and disappeared into her room, from whence, a second later she emerged in hat and coat.

"I've told Mrs. Jenkins to sit up until I come back," she said. A minute later she was seated beside Harper in the big car which she saw contained four more constables.

"What on earth did you let him go for?" demanded the detective, as they tore through the deserted streets.

"He said he was going to a night club," she replied. "Of course, I couldn't stop him, he deserved some fun."

"Fun!" he retorted in great disgust. "I expect he's getting his fill of it now. No, no," he added, hearing a stifled sob beside him. "I don't mean that, of course. We'll get there in time, don't worry. If there's any truth in that story of his about a torture chamber, then we've nothing to fear. Jim Sullivan won't try to get away until he's given him a few hours of it, and though it mayn't be exactly pleasant or what one would choose as a pastime, still, it won't kill him. Sullivan will try and do that just before he hops it. But we'll stop his little game."

They tore on through the night down empty streets, and finally reached their destination.

"And to think they took me in like that," grumbled Harper, as they pulled up fifty yards from the house and he got out. "Now you

stay here and don't move," he went on, turning to Elise. "I'll leave the driver here in case anyone runs out this way and tries to get away in my car. If anyone does," he added to the man, "don't hesitate to shoot. We are dealing with a gang that sticks at nothing, and if one of 'em is shot instead of being hanged it won't count against you."

"Very good, sir."

Harper and his men went cautiously, keeping to the grass, but they had hardly gone two yards when a large hound sprang out from the bushes barking and snarling. One of the constables brought his truncheon down on the brute's head, and it dropped.

"Dead, I expect," said Harper, "but curse it! They'll have heard."

And then a shot rang out from somewhere inside the house.

"Run, men! Don't trouble about a noise. I'm afraid we're too late to save the boy, but we'll get his murderers." His automatic smashed through a window as he spoke, and putting an arm in he undid the catch.

"Two of you run round to the back of the house, there'll be another way out. Wish I'd brought more men."

The two dashed off round the house and the other followed him through the window. There was a faint noise from the other end of the house which sounded like a car starting. As they ran down the passage, there was a shout followed by a shot. They turned towards the

back door, which stood open, and, throwing his light on to it, Harper saw one of the constables struggling with a man.

"Hurry, sir!" called out the officer. "One of 'em's running. I think Sullivan and a woman got clean off in a car. Shot Matthews in the arm. Ah, got you my lad!" he ended, and Harper heard the snap of handcuffs as he passed him at a run. Outside and away in front he heard footsteps running. He was a fast sprinter, and, flashing his lamp, he saw that he was gaining on the dark figure before him, and that the drive led out into a by lane.

"Stop" he called, "or I'll shoot!" but the man in front paid no heed. Twice more he called, with the same result, then he raised his weapon and fired low. The man pitched forward and fell.

"That's all right," said Harper, as he bent over him. "Leg wound only," and then as a constable ran up, "He'll still be fit for the hangman. Help me carry him in." They picked the groaning man up and carried him at a run to the house.

"Cursed sneaking beast," he muttered between his groans. "He made sure of *his* get away all right."

"What, Sullivan?" said Harper. "He would. And what's your name my man? I mean the one you patronise at present?"

"Appleton," was the reply.

"I've heard of you," said Harper, dryly.

" Look after him, Cousins, I'm going down to the cellar."

He found the lights turned up and the trap-door open. Then he clambered down and saw a man in shirt and trousers, with his arms stretched out against the wall, and a pair of staring eyes gazing at him out of a chalk-white face.

" Thank God, he's alive ! " he muttered, as he hurried across to him. " You seem to be pretty tightly trussed up, Mr. Denham. How long have you been like this ? " He busied himself with the buckles, and in doing so touched something on the floor with his foot. He looked down, and the next instant dropped on his knees.

" It's Molly," said Jack, in a dry, husky voice. " She took the bullet that was coming for me. She's—dead, I think."

The detective bent lower. " Yes," he said, quietly, and took the limp body in his arms. Then he called up the trap-door.

" One of you come down here." A constable appeared, and descended the steps. " Carry her up," he said, " and lay her on the sofa. Gently, man, she's made good and some to spare. Mr. Denham is alive because she's dead." The constable took the burden in his arms in silence and went up.

" And now I'll see to your comfort, young man," and Harper proceeded to release him, catching him in strong arms as he toppled over.

"Sit still for a bit and have some of this," said the detective, and held a flask to his lips.

"What's the time?" asked Jack, when he could speak.

"After three," was the reply.

"Six hours of it," he said, "and I thought it was weeks. I'm parched, Harper."

"Well, get home then, as soon as you can. Mrs. Allwood's out there in the car."

"Here?" he cried, amazed.

"Just that. Where else do you suppose she would be?"

"Of course," said Jack, in a dazed sort of voice. "I'm afraid I've caused a lot of trouble, Harper."

"There's no getting away from that," was the dry retort. "But you've paid for your fun any way. Let me help you on with your things."

"I feel as if I'd been thrashed," he said, wincing as he put on his jacket. "Poor Molly released me from that collar, or I shouldn't be alive now. It kept me strung up with my toes barely touching the ground. I was bound to have choked when my strength gave out."

Harper swore. "Damned brutes!" he said. "You've been through it and no mistake. But you're safe now for a bit."

"You got them? Sullivan——? Mike?" asked Jack, still in a dazed kind of voice.

"Mike and Appleton are bagged, but Sullivan

and a woman got away in a car after plugging one of my men in the arm."

Jack looked at him queerly. "I'm glad of that," he said. "He's my quarry. Harper, one day I shall get him. I owe poor Molly that."

"That's enough," snapped Harper. "He's our job and you can keep your hands off in future. He'll lie low somewhere for a bit. Get another hiding-place, I reckon. Now come on out of this, I'll help you." They climbed up, and in the room above Jack glanced round, and the next moment was bending over something lying covered on the sofa. He gently raised the cloth that hid her face; she looked happier and more peaceful than he had ever seen her.

"Poor kid," he muttered, and turned away. In the passage outside they passed the two prisoners under guard, and a constable with his arm bandaged.

"Glad you escaped, young 'un," said Mike. "You're a good plucked 'un."

"Thank you, Mike," he replied, and then, turning to Harper as they got outside, "He's not as bad as the others."

"He'll get what's coming to him," retorted the detective, dryly.

They reached the car where Elise was standing waiting for him, one of the constables having told her what had happened. She did not seem to notice Harper or the driver, but just put her arms about Jack's neck.

"Thank God!" she said. Jack was silent; for once words failed him, and in any case they were not needed.

"Get in, please," said Harper. "I'll send you back in the car, and it can return and pick us up. I'll get another from the station here, or use yours. Keep him quiet, Mrs. Allwood," he went on, putting his head in at the window. "He's had a bit of a shock and has been putting in a few hours best described as hell." Then his hand went up in salute. "Good luck, Mrs. Allwood, you've been just splendid." The car drove off.

Once only, during the long drive, did Elise break the silence.

"Poor Molly," she said unsteadily, "she made good at last." Then, after a pause, "Jack, it's been rather a strain and I'm going to cry."

"Yes, my darling," said Jack, and drew her head on to his shoulder. After another silence, rather longer than the first, he said, as though his words were part of some long unspoken conversation, "Yes, one day I'll have the pleasure of killing Jim Sullivan." And then, unconsciously repeating his brother's very words: "While he's alive the world isn't a fit place to live in."

"You're better, dear?" murmured Elise, as they drew up at their destination and the driver rang the bell.

"No, I'm very ill," he replied. "Almost at death's door after all I've been through.

But I've got a notion that one more kiss like the last—no, he's not looking—would make me quite well almost at once."

Elise Allwood, thereupon effected a miraculous cure.

THE END

UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY
A 000 043 663 4